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# argosy

Vol. XXV No. 4 APRIL 1964


Cellar Cool . . . . . Geoffrey Household . . 4

Basket of Eggs . . . . Vivian Connell . . . 10
*Illustration by Mary Dinsdale*

Proof . . . . . Henry Cecil . . . . 20

Roundabout Rollick . . . . . 24

Lease of a Gold-banded Pen . Joan Aiken . . . . 27
*Illustration by Jennetta Vise*

Bishop Quinn and Lucifer . . Taylor Caldwell . . . 40
*Illustration by Biro*

Noon Gun . . . . . Theodore Sturgeon . . 59

The Courtyard . . . . Bill Rodney . . . . 72
*Illustration by Langhammer*

At a Distance . . . . . 82

Star-crossed . . . . . Edith Pargeter . . . 85

Last Answer . . . . . Hal Ellson . . . . 95

Shadow of St Germain . . John Adrian . . . . 100

Argosy's Shakespeare Award . . . . . 103

Killer in the Rain No. 2 :
The Man Who Liked Dogs . Raymond Chandler . . 106
*Illustrations by Robb*

Argosy Prize Crossword . . . . . 136


*Acknowledgments are due for permission to reprint copyright material by the following authors : to Collins for the story by Taylor Caldwell from " To See the Glory " ; to Gerald Duckworth for the extract by Elizabeth Goudge ; to Gollancz for the extract by Daphne du Maurier ; to Rupert Hart-Davis for the extract by Arthur Calder Marshall ; to Hutchinson for the extract by Edna O'Brien ; to Secker and Warburg for lines by Patrick MacDonogh; to The Society of Authors for the extract by Katherine Mansfield*

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A Fleetway magazine

**Geoffrey Household's stories—with their highly characteristic polish and sparkle—are always welcome arrivals in the Argosy office, and doubly so at the moment, for they have a high scarcity value—Household has been busy working on his latest novel and in recent months has had little time for shorts.**

**Born in 1900, Geoffrey Household was given what he calls a conventional upbringing—so much so that after four years of a staid career in banking he'd had enough, and went off to sell bananas in Spain. Subsequently, arriving in the U.S.A. during the Depression, he kept himself from starvation by writing children's plays for radio. After a period of travelling in Printers' Inks around Europe and Latin America—this occupation seems almost too symbolic of a roving writer's life but he swears it's so—his first novel The Third Hour came out and his career as an author was assured. It was interrupted, however, after the publication of the famous Rogue Male, by cloak-and-dagger gaddings in the Balkans and Middle East as an Intelligence Officer in World War II. Returned to civilian life and literature, he plunged vigorously into writing again and produced some of his best-known novels, several of which we serialised in Argosy. In his latest—Thing To Love—he returned to one of his favourite settings—a Latin American republic where even bloodthirsty revolution isn't allowed to interfere too solemnly with civilised living.**

**We're always excited when a new Household story comes in, and this one made us laugh so heartily that we had it whipped into the new issue of Argosy almost before the postman had reslung his bag.**

**And now,**

**down to**

**Geoffrey Household's cellar. . .**

# Cellar Cool

## By GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

YOU might as well listen, darling . . . All right, then, I won't call you darling. Just a matter of habit. One can't drop it at once . . . No, of course it wasn't just a habit.

How the devil do I know if you can use the same evidence? I've never been cited as a co-respondent before. It certainly was *not* the merest luck. I've always been faithful to you. I was this time, too. I can't help it if the lawyers say the bastard is bound to win his case. So what? Because the blasted Law says I am guilty, it doesn't mean I am.

Yes, I know it doesn't do any good, swearing. But if I want to, I shall. After all, you aren't on speaking terms with me. I'm a lonely man with every right to talk to himself in strong language. And there'll be plenty of it before I get used to being a co-respondent. Damn it, I admit we looked like co, but there was no responding whatever!

You won't understand . . . Yes, I know you can understand anything I can . . . But this is difficult. You see, we start with the fact that you like swilling cocktails before dinner, and I like wine with it . . . No, please don't walk off! I agree. I agree entirely that one cocktail before dinner cannot be described as swilling.

All I mean is that people who are devoted to one way of living can't ever quite believe in enthusiasts for another. That rich, incompetent slob, that white-nosed twerp, that hypocritical, dirty-minded financier, is much worse than—I mean, he drinks water. He's a rabid teetotaller. He should have married a Welsh preacher, not a charming Belgian who was the daughter of a hotelier and had the wine list in her nursery along with Peter Rabbit.

I used the word *charming*, darling . . . Yes, of course I'll cut that out . . . I used it in the sense of cultivated, civilised. Her—er—personal charms I have never considered at all. She has a face like a very amiable horse, even if she does have a pretty figure.

No, I am *not* in a position to judge. And if I was, which I deny, it's not my fault.

I'd never seen the woman before. It was her husband who asked me to dine and stay the night. He could hardly do anything else when I had just missed the last train because he'd sacked his chauffeur for keeping turpentine in a gin bottle. And a dream of a dinner it was. Naturally one would expect a woman like that . . . No, I wasn't implying any criticism at *all!* What I meant was that she had the training to see that he used his money properly. French chef. Butler. Gardeners. All that.

But only water to go with the meal! His blasted principles! You wouldn't think that he'd compel his poor wife to be teetotal as well. He wouldn't have a drop under his roof.

Yes, I know! I'm coming to the cellar. He had bought the house from executors as it stood—pictures, cellar, and all. And he was too damn mean to sell off the wines when he thought they were bound to improve in value over the years. The bloody fool was quite wrong. Some of those clarets and white Burgundies were long past their best and growing more worthless every day.

No, I am not giving a lecture on wine. I am just trying to make the position clear.

When we had finished the coffee, he pushed off upstairs to annoy his Dictaphone. All the noble thoughts inspired by water had to go down on the tape ready for his secretaries next day. He said that no doubt Gabrielle would entertain me. Hardly polite. I could see her raise an eyebrow. That sort of remark does suggest to a sensitive woman that she is safely unattractive.

She was very easy to talk to. I could see we had a good deal in common. We both enjoyed simple pleasures—of the palate, and so forth. We were getting on fine, except that in the absence of anything to drink there were occasional silences which we would each try to break at the same time. She must have felt that it was a pity our social intercourse— That was quite unworthy of you, my dear. And anyway I think the courts call it Intimacy like the Sunday papers— She felt, as I was saying, that it was a pity the going should be so hard.

At last she asked me, very confidentially, if I would like a brandy after my coffee. And when I said I would, she got up and told me to take one of her husband's overcoats out of the hall.

Now, that should be a good point in Court. After all a man doesn't borrow an overcoat to . . . Well, the Judge will understand it even if you don't!

M'Lud, I shall say, if these allegations were correct, we should not have chosen the cold and discomfort of a cellar. There was

a large garden where impropriety could have taken place in idyllic surroundings. And it was a warm evening. The lady did not need her second-best mink nor I an overcoat. An overcoat implies, as I need hardly tell Your Lordship . . .

No, I am not blathering. I maintain that the overcoat is evidence that there was no mens rea, if we may so describe the intention to commit adultery.

Entry to the cellar was strictly forbidden. It was a shameful secret, like Bluebeard's. But Gabrielle had had a private key cut for herself. And I assure you that the cellar wasn't furnished as a love nest. There was just a bench.

She told me that she had never been down there before with anyone who really cared—for wine, that is. She took me on a conducted tour of the bins. I don't know who laid down those wines, but he knew what he was about.

A family cellar, we decided. Father training son. It was so traditional that I was surprised to find comparatively little port. She said that the butler had been selling it off. Of course the crook—a teetotaller like his boss—had had his own key made. The chance was too good to miss. By careful marketing he could put anything from five to ten thousand pounds in his own pocket.

Her situation was difficult. She couldn't report that the butler visited the cellar without giving herself away. Nor could he drop a hint that she did. Armed neutrality. I gathered there was an unspoken agreement that he could make away with the port—which didn't interest her—so long as there were no sudden gaps in the table wines.

Slipping down for a quick nip—well, she had been doing that ever since they bought the house. But it was no way to treat such a cellar, and she knew it. My heart bleeds for her. She might as well have kept a bottle of hooch wrapped up in her night-dresses at the back of the bedroom wardrobe . . .

That is most unkind! It would *not* have been a more convenient place!

Everything we could possibly want was on the spot . . . Yes, I know I said the cellar wasn't furnished at all. It was not. When I say *everything*, I mean corkscrews of suitable sizes, a wonderful range of the right glasses, and a box of dry biscuits.

It's seldom one finds the perfect partner for any really delicate hobby. What I didn't know, she did. Occasionally I knew something she didn't. And with all those wines simply asking to be opened and tasted, we were able to illustrate our theories on the spot. I think we had quite forgotten each other's sex.

Don't snort in that way! It was very natural. There's a

proper time for everything. If you found yourself in Aladdin's Cave with diamonds and rubies all over the floor, all you'd think about would be spreading out your skirt and filling it.

No, I am not accusing you of being mercenary! When I said *you* I meant *one*. Me! Anybody!

Orgy, indeed! There was no question of an orgy. I was opening bottles in order to add a little to the world's store of knowledge. The stuff was so good that it didn't affect me in the least. I was feeling extremely sane and active, except perhaps for the slightest touch of indigestion as a result of eating so many biscuits. Naturally I took a biscuit to clear my palate between one glass and another, and they added up.

Gabrielle was just taking sips of our choices, whereas I may have swallowed half a glass of each. I thought she was holding her own very well, allowing for normal feminine discretion.

I was about to say when you interrupted me that I have never believed in the superstition that you must always let a claret breathe. Many of them are at their best if drunk as soon as the cork is pulled. I was just developing this point—with examples from some of the '52s—when I was surprised to notice that she was fast asleep with her back against an old beer barrel.

She looked very uncomfortable. I could hardly leave such a perfect hostess in that position . . . No, her mouth was not open . . . I did exactly what any old family friend of hers would have done. I put a half bottle of 1947 Pauillac within easy reach of my left hand. I sat down beside her on her husband's overcoat and drew her poor, tired head down on my shoulder.

Yes, I know the depositions state that she was in a state of undress. She must have caught the zip on something, or perhaps tried to loosen herself up under the impression that she was fainting. With the dam' fool evening frocks you women wear, it's amazing you aren't always in a state of undress. I didn't feel that I ought to start tinkering with the mechanics of whalebone and such when she was fast asleep. Suppose she had woken up and entirely misunderstood my intentions?

I did at one point—when I wanted to get up and try a Margaux against the Pauillac—give her a shake, and all she did was to snuggle up and say No.

I don't know what you mean by *what else could she say*? It was a quite unmistakeable shake. Her reply simply indicated that she wished to go on sleeping and that I was not to disentangle myself . . . No, I am not asking you to believe she was three years old. She must be about thirty.

What I ought to have done—I admit that—was to pick her up,

deposit her in the drawing-room and go to bed. But it wasn't so easy. I was not at all sure of the right direction to turn on reaching the top of the cellar steps. I was trying to draw a kind of mental map of the passages when I fell asleep, too. I must have unconsciously pulled her mink over the pair of us.

*No, we were not lying on the floor. Sitting!* I don't care what the depositions say. We may have slipped down a bit. But our position would properly be described as sitting.

I suppose that damned thief of a butler had been keeping an eye on her movements. He wasn't going to miss a chance like that. With Gabrielle out of the way, nobody would be any the wiser if he sold off the whole cellar. He could fill the racks up with empty bottles, and take the first plane to Australia.

I woke up to see him measuring us with his eyes as if he had been the managing director of a funeral parlour. And his blasted boss was dancing around and throwing bottles on the floor without any of his usual reverence for his own property.

Yet I give you my word that what the butler saw was nothing. And what that obscene teetotaller saw was not enough to disturb any reasonably broadminded husband.

I didn't know what attitude to take. There ought to be a school for co-respondents. I see now that it's only too easy for an innocent person to find himself in that distasteful position. A week's quick course should be enough to teach the etiquette and a few manly phrases which would lower the painful tone of excitement—no harder than learning to write a good business letter.

Gabrielle rebuked him, I thought, with dignity. But she met with no response. It is most unjust that the poor woman should have to suffer for irreproachable hospitality. What really made the intolerable fellow boil when he stirred up the coats was not the slight disorder in her dress, as Herrick-calls it, but the signs of what he called alcoholism.

Alcoholism! I ask you! As if anyone would willingly drink himself into a beastly stupor when such joys for the palate still remained to be explored!

I understand that the settlement will be amicable. Gabrielle stood out for the contents of the cellar and got them. I may find myself compelled to help her with the inventory and the moving. It's the least I can do, though for the sake of the wines she would be wiser to choose a professional. That's most important. I think I can find her an experienced man.

*You believe me, darling?* You really see that there is nothing to forgive? Bless you! I felt sure that if you would only listen you would understand.

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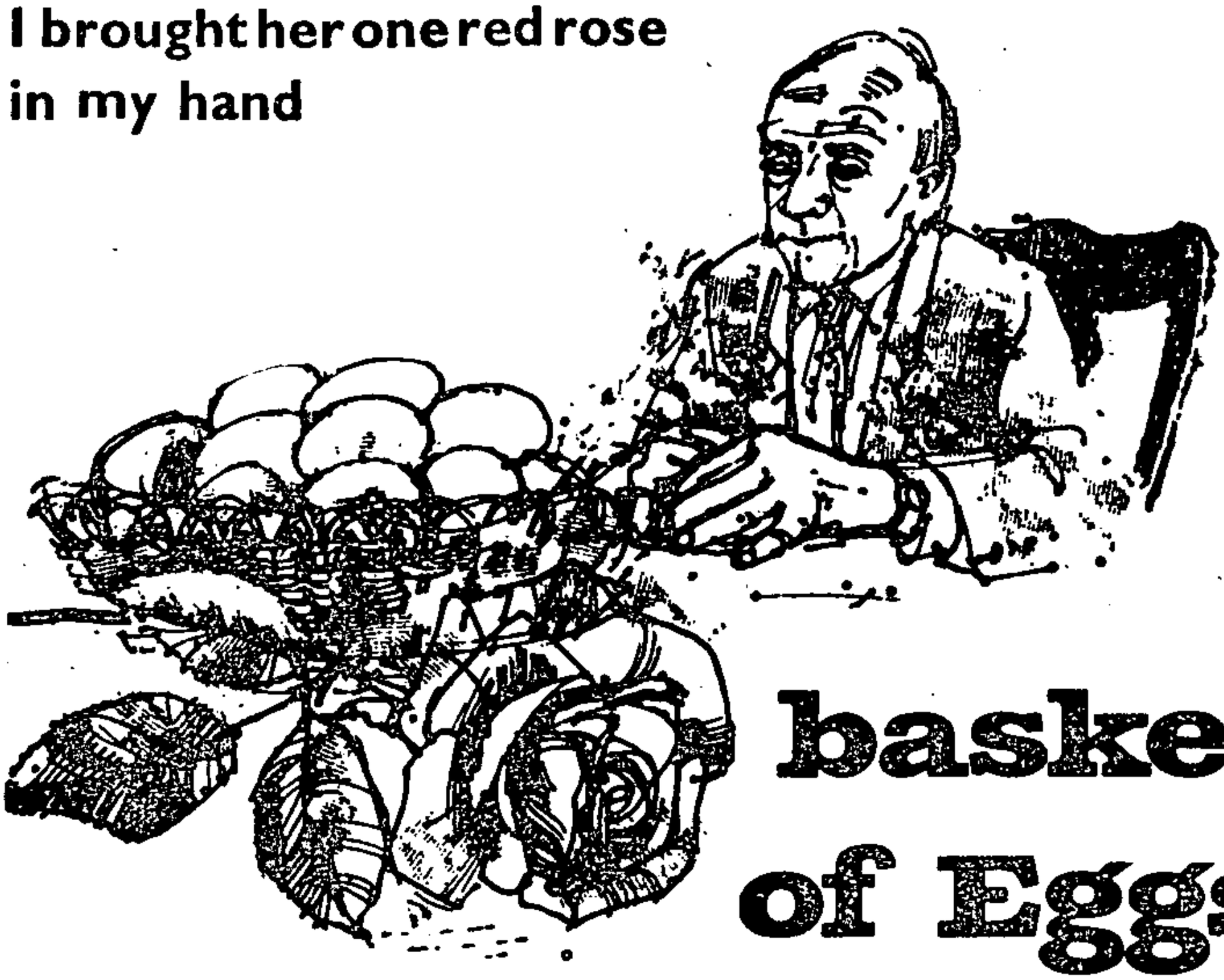
I brought her one red rose
in my hand



# basket of Eggs

I CAME into the dining-room of the hotel for breakfast, and the bowl of painted eggs on a stand reminded me that it was Easter Sunday. I sat by the window and the sunlight came in and a bird sang in a tree. The waiter, Augustin, smiled at me and I said, "Two boiled eggs. But not those painted eggs."

There was a reserved card on the next table laid for two and I wondered why. It was early in the morning and I was alone in the room.

I had finished my breakfast and read all the news in the local Geneva newspaper and I was just about to leave when Augustin placed a basket of white eggs on the reserved table.

"Are two people going to eat all those eggs, Augustin?"

"I don't know, Mr. O'Shane. A gentleman called down to keep a table with two places and to have a basket with twelve plain white eggs on the table. He sounded like an American."

"Bring me some more tea," I said. I was curious about that basket of eggs.

Then a small man in a grey suit came into the room with a red rose in his hand. He saw the basket of eggs and went to his table and laid the rose by the vacant place. Then he sat down facing me and suddenly his blue eyes brightened all the room.

**by VIVIAN CONNELL**

They were clear as a blue lake in Connemara. He was old and small but looked big in heart and mind. Like a little jockey who had ridden tall horses, or a leprechaun of a poet who had made great songs. I thought I knew his face, but that might have been a fancy. He gazed out of the window and listened to the singing of the bird.

"Breakfast, sir?"

He looked up at Augustin and his voice was soft as a harp in Ireland. "Ah, I'll wait a while . . ." His face was in a dream. "Listen to that thrush that sings on Easter morning."

He gazed out of the window, listening to the thrush; but I knew he was not here in Geneva. He was away somewhere. And I wanted to go there. I poured more tea and waited on the story of the basket of white eggs and the red rose.

He was away somewhere, and now his mood led me away, and I began to dream of home and Ireland. But the clock over the bridge on the Rhône struck the hour and reminded me I had a story in hand. When I got up, I paused, and I smiled at the basket of eggs on his table.

"Like a basket of eggs at home in Ireland," I said, "that you'd bring to a neighbour on Easter Sunday morning."

He looked at me from miles away beyond the light in his blue eyes. "Ah, you are Irish. Won't you sit down?"

I sat down—he was so friendly—and I asked, "Aren't you going to have breakfast?"

"In a moment. I came down early. I always wake up like a young man on Easter morning." He smiled. "And what is your name?"

"Conal O'Shane."

"The author?" I nodded. "I read a story by you a little time ago, a story of Connemara . . . Made me remember . . ."

"And what is your name, sir?"

"Madigan, Michael Madigan."

"There's a Madigan's Store in the main street."

"That's me."

"Ah, I read a story on you in a magazine. About a year ago, when you retired from business. Your picture was on the cover. That is why I thought I knew your face. It was a long story, I remember. It began when you landed in America with one Irish shilling in your pocket, and ended when you had a mansion in Boston, and a hundred million American dollars in the bank." I smiled. "It didn't tell me a damn thing about you. Where do you come from, anyway?"

"Coolaun. In Connemara. On the Atlantic road up from Galway. A little village the size of a postcard. Thirteen white

cottages with yellow thatch and turf smoke from the chimneys. Above the green Atlantic, below the blue mountains. That's where I did grow. But you'd think from the magazine story I was born the day I landed in America." He smiled. "And although I did not tell the magazine, it was not in Boston, but in Coolaun, that I started in business . . ."

"In eggs?"

"O'Shane, you're a damn smart boy! Yes, I started in business with a basket of eggs in the village of Coolaun."

"Tell me the story."

Once more he looked out the window a long time, and I guessed he was away at Coolaun, and he came back with a smile, and began.

I lived with my uncle in a cottage—a kitchen with a floor of clay, and one room. My father and brother had gone down in an Atlantic storm, fishing in a currach, and then my mother died, maybe of sorrow. So I was a kind of an orphan. My uncle had a field of one acre, three sheep, a goat for milk, and seven hens. That gave no work in the winter, so I roamed by the sea and by the hill, and all of a sudden I started making poems. I sent one of them to a poetry magazine in Dublin called *The Harp of Tara.* I mailed it on the day that Pat Faherty the old bachelor died and left his farm of four acres down the bogland road to his sister who was a widow over on Aran.

Nothing at all happened in Coolaun except that in a month the widow came over from Aran with a beautiful daughter called Mary. Now, in Galway, on her way up to Coolaun, the widow bought twenty-five Black Minorca and twenty-five Brown Leghorn hens to stock the farm. In winter there was nothing to sell off the land, only eggs, to bring money into the house, so the widow was a wise woman. Also, she had the money to buy fifty hens, so she was a long way the richest woman in the countryside, and her daughter Mary was not only a beauty, but an heiress in a place like Coolaun.

I was sitting on the green bank of the road making a poem, the first day Mary came up to the village, and she carried a basket in her hand. She gave me a greeting in Irish, and she walked up the road, with her basket in one hand, and my heart in the other hand. It had leapt up in me singing like a lark out of the grass the moment I saw her beauty and it went into the nest of her hand.

It was a day with sunlight and rain, and Mary walked into the village under a rainbow. I walked a little way behind her, and she stopped where the two shops in the village, Murphy's, and

Manley's, faced each other across the street. Both shops had a card in the window:

EGGS. PURCHASE PRICE: ONE SHILLING A DOZEN.

She stepped to the right and went into Manley's, and Murphy, the bachelor, came out into his doorway, and saw the beautiful girl from the islands go into the shop of the bachelor Manley. I stepped into Manley's doorway, and saw Mary count out one dozen eggs, and get a silver shilling. Then she bought a four-ounce packet of tea for fourpence, and a pound of sugar for twopence. When she came out, she walked past all the eyes in the village of Coolaun.

Manley came out with a smile under his black thatch, and looked across the road at Murphy, who had a scowl under his red hair, and all the village knew the battle would begin for the custom and maybe the hand of the beautiful girl from the islands. I was only a gossoon of eighteen years who lived on his uncle's acre and who never had a silver shilling in his hand.

I walked around under the moon all night, and around the house of Mary, as if I would make a fairy ring, to keep her all my own. I did not go to bed at all, and I came home to light the fire and boil the kettle in the morning. Then I walked up the village, and I read the card in Murphy's window:

EGGS. PURCHASE PRICE: TWO SHILLINGS A DOZEN.

I looked across the road and Manley was still ONE SHILLING on his card. And then, out of the blue air, a poem came into my head. A poem made of money.

It had taken me a week to get one penny from my uncle to buy a stamp to mail the poem to Dublin. So I walked down the bogland road under a black cloud of despair. Then from under the black raincloud came Paeder the postman riding on his donkey from Carrigmor where the mail came from Galway.

He stopped and bade me good morning, and got off his donkey. He lit his clay pipe, opened his bag and found a letter and handed it to me. I had never got such a letter in all my life, and I opened the envelope with a shaking hand. It was a letter from *The Harp of Tara* accepting my poem and enclosing a postal order for five shillings.

As soon as I had my breath again, I said, "Change it for me, Paeder. If my uncle hears about it, he'll take it all. And don't tell anybody in the village, Paeder, about the poem or the money."

Paeder looked at me for a long time. Then he took the letter from *The Harp of Tara*, and read aloud: *We are happy to buy your poem, that is clear and sweet as the song of a lark.*

He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Michael, I'm proud of you. I'll change the P.O. for you, and I'll keep it all a

secret between you and me and the little leprechaun who came into you and made the poem."

I walked up the road and the five silver shillings in my pocket jingled like bells. I went into the cottage and got my old schoolbag and I strolled up the village and into Manley's shop.

"Good morning," I said. "How much a dozen for eggs?"

"You saw the card in the window," said Manley with a black scowl. "One shilling a dozen."

"I want a dozen, please."

Manley was stunned and I was not surprised. Nobody in Coolaun had ever bought a dozen eggs. Nobody had the money to buy any eggs at all. Manley sold the eggs he bought to Callahan from Galway who came every Saturday with his horse and van to Coolaun. Then Manley said, "The selling price of eggs is one shilling and threepence."

I put two shillings on the counter and he handed me ninepence change and counted me a dozen eggs. I walked out of the shop whistling an Irish jig and I left Manley all dazed in the morning.

I was sitting on the green bank writing a poem when Mary came along that afternoon with a basket in her hand. When she had gone about fifty paces, I got up with my schoolbag of eggs and followed her into the village. She stopped between Murphy's and Manley's, looked at the windows, and then went into Manley's.

I nearly dropped dead with the shock but I could not turn back with all the eyes of the village on me. So I walked up, and then I saw the card in Manley's window:

EGGS. PURCHASE PRICE: THREE SHILLINGS A DOZEN.

I choked down a laugh. The battle of the eggs was on in Coolaun. I went into Manley's and stood by while Mary sold her eggs and was handed three shillings. Then I said, "And I've got a dozen for you, Mister Manley."

Manley nearly jumped over the counter and bawled at me, "Listen, boy, you wait until I'm finished with this young lady. Maybe she wants to buy things."

"I'm in no hurry at all," said Mary.

I sold the dozen eggs I had bought from Manley for one shilling and threepence, back to him for three shillings, and there was black murder in his face as he handed me the money.

The next morning I walked into the village and looked at the window cards. Manley was still giving three shillings, but now Murphy was up to four shillings. I bought a dozen for one and threepence from Murphy, and he looked at me with a suspicious eye and gave me no smile at all.

That afternoon again I followed Mary into the village, but now I was bolder and I walked almost on her heel. Manley was standing in his doorway with a big smile on his face, and a card in his window giving five shillings a dozen. Murphy was sitting on the shelf of his window smoking a pipe. But now suddenly he got up and showed the card he had been hiding with his back to the window:

EGGS. PURCHASE PRICE: SIX SHILLINGS A DOZEN.

I laughed out loud at Manley's face, as Mary went into Murphy's shop. I waited until she had got her six shillings and then I said, "And I've got a dozen for you, Mister Murphy."

Murphy bought his own eggs back from me, and his face was red as his hair in anger but he dared not make a quarrel with the beautiful Mary standing by. She was looking very puzzled by now about the mystery of the eggs in Coolaun, but she was a stranger from the islands and had the wisdom not to ask the why.

I was busy on my poem on the green bank when Mary came back from the village and she stopped and looked at me all in a blush and spoke. "I don't want to bother you—but why is there such a mad price for eggs in Coolaun?"

"Can't you guess?"

I would not say any more nor help in any way and she stood there all in fire in her beauty.

Then she asked, "How many hens have you got?"

"Seven."

"Seven! And you . . . What do you feed them on?"

"Rabbit seed."

She looked at me and then she began to laugh. She walked away down the road all ringing with laughter like a bell and all the countryside broke into a carillon of music on that lovely day.

I put the poem in my pocket and went up the path and sat on a stile and put my mind to business. I had to get eggs to make money and I knew that Manley and Murphy would not sell me one more egg. And it had been a hard winter with frost and a bitter wind. Bad weather for hens to lay. Well, I had to go out and look for eggs about the countryside.

I was up at daylight next morning, and I walked nearly ten miles and called at twenty cottages and farms and I got only thirty-three eggs. But I paid a farthing above the penny for each egg and I knew I would be welcome back again any day.

I knew I could not go into Manley's or Murphy's again, so I waited on the green bank for Mary in the afternoon. Along she came with her basket and found me all steeped in my poem. She stopped and greeted me but I did not look up for a minute.

"Listen," I said, "I'm busy on a poem, and I've got two and

a half dozen eggs here in that bag. Will you sell them for me?"

She hesitated and I knew she wondered if I had stolen the eggs, but I just kept looking into her blue eyes deeper than any lake in Connemara.

"Give me the eggs," she said.

When she came back she opened her purse and handed me a folded piece of paper. I took it and looked at her and she guessed I did not understand.

"It's a pound note," she said. "Two and a half dozen eggs at eight shillings, from Manley."

"A pound note!" I was talking to myself. "A pound note. And I never had a shilling in my hand before this week."

Suddenly she sat down by me and asked, "Tell me, where did you get the eggs?"

"I bought them around the countryside this morning. But the dozen I sold to Manley, I bought from Manley, and the dozen I sold to Murphy, I bought from Murphy."

Then I told her what had happened and she began to laugh. She rolled, laughing, on the bank. I had never seen a girl laugh like Mary.

Then I got serious and I said, "This can't last long, these two damn fools Manley and Murphy trying to court you with a handful of shillings. So sell all the eggs you have each day. And I'll be up early in the morning, and out hunting eggs in the countryside."

She nodded and she got up to go. Then she paused and asked me, "Do you really make poems?"

"If I had not made a poem I would not have had the money to buy the eggs . . ."

Then suddenly I lost my head and showed her the letter from *The Harp of Tara*. She read it and her voice was all in a hush of breath when she spoke. "Can I see the poem?"

"I have no copy on me. But I'll say it to you."

I spoke her the poem, and maybe it was the sun coming by the mountain, but she seemed all made of light on the road, and she was looking at me in the strangest way . . . And then suddenly she ran, wild, like a wild girl on an island, down the road, and away into the light of the sun.

Mary sold three dozen eggs for me at ten shillings a dozen, and then two dozen at twelve shillings, but I knew the golden market would be over on Saturday, the day the country people came into Coolaun to sell their eggs and make the household money. And on Saturday morning, when I went into the village, the old ONE SHILLING cards were back in the windows of Manley and Murphy, who both had lost the battle for Mary.

I went down to Mary's farm to tell the bad news, and the widow O'Brien was shaking corn for the Black Minorca and Brown Leghorn hens. She came to welcome me and shook my hand. "Ah, Mary has told me about you. 'Tis glad I am to meet a man of the world in Coolaun."

There I stood, in my old jersey, a greenhorn who had never worn a collar and tie, and she had called me a man of the world. In a week I had grown from boy to man. And I had a pocket of money to prove it all. The house was clean as the islands of Aran washed by the wind and sea and polished by the sun, and we had tea and hot scones with butter. I had not tasted butter since Christmas Day.

Then Callahan, on his way back to Galway from the village, stopped his white horse and yellow van at the gate, and came into the doorway and greeted the widow O'Brien.

"I saw all the beautiful hens in the yard, Ma'am, and I wondered if you had any eggs for sale. There's a famine of eggs in Galway, and the American liner comes into the bay on Thursday, and they always want thousands of eggs, for the voyage to New York."

"How much a dozen?" I asked.

"The same price I pay Manley and Murphy. One shilling and threepence a dozen." He smiled at the widow. "So you'll gain by selling to me."

"And what do you sell them for in Galway?" I asked him.

"Well, I need a profit for journeying all the week about the County Galway."

"Indeed!" I said. "But we have no eggs for sale today. God bless you on the road."

He went away and the widow O'Brien looked at me and laughed.

"Well! So now you are the manager of my poultry farm, Mr. Madigan!"

I was making up a poem about an Atlantic liner in my head and I got up and I said, "I'll call back on Monday morning. And I'll give you one and sixpence a dozen for your eggs."

I walked out of the gate whistling and I felt tall on the road. It was the first time anybody had called me Mr. Madigan.

I told my Uncle Tim over a dinner of potatoes and goat's milk on Sunday that I was going into Galway to find work, and he looked old and alone but he gave me his blessing for the road. On Monday morning I bought all her eggs from the widow O'Brien, and Mary came to the gate and wished me God's sunlight on my journey.

I did not get to Galway until Wednesday, and I slept rough in cowsheds on the way, but I had forty dozen eggs in an old

wheelbarrow I pushed before me into Galway City. There I bought an old suit and a collar and tie at a stall on the pavement. I found an old crate and a bundle of hay and I packed the eggs in the hay with a loving hand. Then I slept alongside the crate by the harbour, and the moon shone her blessing on me.

On Thursday the great ship came into the bay, and the steward came ashore all dignified and blue in his uniform. But in one hour he was storming like a pirate because he could not buy enough eggs in Galway for the long Atlantic voyage. It was then I stepped forward on the quay.

"I've got forty dozen, sir."

"How much? Are they newlaid?"

"Newborn, sir."

He roared laughing and he brought me into the shipping office and paid me ten beautiful pound notes. Then he lit a cigar.

"I'll be back in a month from today. That is the Thursday before Easter. There won't be an egg in Galway, and I'll need thousands for breakfast at sea on Easter Sunday. How many can you supply?" He paused. "Five hundred dozen?"

"Yes, sir. At five shillings a dozen. But you must pay half the money in advance, or I can't guarantee you the eggs."

"Fair enough." He got out a cheque book. "Who are you in business?"

"Madigan and Company, Coolaun. But we trade in cash only."

"Very well. Sign this invoice of agreement and I'll pay you in cash. A cigar, Mr. Madigan?" I shook my head and he looked at me. "You're a bright young man, Mr. Madigan, to have that crate of eggs waiting on the quay. Where is Coolaun?"

"Up in Connemara. A small village."

"I suppose you are a long way the biggest man in business at Coolaun?"

I changed my mind then and I took a cigar.

"I am," I said. "I'm a long way the biggest man in Coolaun."

Then he roared out laughing again.

"Newborn eggs!"

I was busy all the month going about the wild country of Connaught and buying in advance to have six thousand eggs all laid fresh and ready to pack before the ship came in at Easter, and I had no time to go home to Coolaun. Also I saw the American Consul and made plans. Then I wrote to Mary and asked her to come up to Galway and see the grand American liner in the bay.

The ship came in on a sunny morning, and I had all his order ready for the steward. The sale completed, I went round to the passenger office, and then along to meet Mary in Connacht

Square. She was waiting at the corner, and I brought her one red rose in my hand.

" I would like to bring you a garden, Mary, but all I can afford is one red rose."

" But you look all rich in that suit, Michael, and a nice clean collar and blue tie."

" I spent all my money," I said, and I opened my other hand.

" What is that? " she asked.

" My ticket, on that ship to New York."

Then I saw her face as white as the rose was red and she whispered, " So I came to say good-bye? "

" I must go," I said. " I'll be sending for you. Maybe in one year if you'll be happy to get married in a small church. Maybe in five years, if you want a grand wedding in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York."

She looked at me with all the lakes of Connemara in her eyes. " Michael, the day I marry you, the smallest church in the world will be St. Patrick's Cathedral." Then she ran away down the Square, with the sunlight tossing in her golden hair, and the Atlantic wind blowing through her soul.

I landed in America with one silver shilling in my pocket. In one year I opened a small shop in Boston. One room, and one window. I put only a basket of eggs in the window and a card:

NEWBORN EGGS.

Before long there was a policeman outside holding back women who wanted to buy newborn eggs. They were coming down in carriages from Beacon Hill. So . . .

One day a year later I walked out in the countryside of New England, and I came upon a small church in the shade of a wood. And then in a vision I saw Mary all in white and shining in the porch of the church, and I knew it was St. Patrick's Cathedral. So I sent a letter and an Atlantic boat ticket to Coolaun . . . And, well, that is all!

A church bell rang in the morning and I realised with a start that we were here in Geneva.

" Gosh, we were away in Ireland! " I smiled. " And now, are you going to eat that basket of eggs? "

" Och, no! It's just a habit that's grown along the years. A basket of eggs and one red rose on Easter Morning . . . Just to remind us . . ."

His face was suddenly the face of a gossoon in Connemara looking at a colleen coming up the road to Coolaun.

I was surprised that Mary had white hair when she came to the table and picked up the rose.

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# *Proof*

## By HENRY CECIL

**Like a good detective he felt bound to arrest him**

THE POMPOUS, self-satisfied little lawyer from London had been holding forth the whole evening, and I had tried in vain to deflate him. Not merely were my efforts wasted but he turned his batteries in my direction and effectually silenced me. I prayed for reinforcements.

It may surprise you to know that, although I come from a long line of distinguished lawyers, I have a particular aversion to the breed. This may be due to the fact that I was unable to satisfy the examiners in Roman Law and so have never even achieved the distinction of being called to the Bar. Be that as it may, I had an instinctive dislike of lawyers. This one was a particularly odious specimen, and I disliked him all the more because everyone else seemed interested in what he had to say and he was allowed virtually to monopolise the conversation.

We had been sitting in the bar of the small Lakeland hotel where I had been spending a much needed holiday. Since my failure at law, I had been employed in many capacities, including that of clerk, salesman, and commercial traveller. At the moment, I was going up and down the country trying to sell the publications of a new psychical research society. As my earnings were entirely dependent on what I sold, I had a hard time of it to make a living, trying to persuade very matter-of-fact earthy people to buy our books on psychic phenomena. How I wished that some manifestation would present itself to the busy little lawyer and reduce his self-esteem—but nothing happened.

On and on he went, and it was a great relief to me when two strangers suddenly came in and distracted everyone's attention from him. They were very ordinary-looking people, but they entered with some noise and, as their faces were unknown to any of us, their entrance automatically stopped the conversation. They walked straight up to the bar, ordered a pint of beer each, and drank it without a word. That done, they repeated the dose

and only then did they seem to relax. Finally, one said to the other, " That was a complete and utter waste of time."

" Absolutely."

" D'you know," said the first, addressing us generally, " we've been all the way to the top of Grimstone Crag, and we didn't see a thing."

They could not have been ordinary climbers, as no climber would consider any climb a waste of time, view or no view. Accordingly, none of us was much impressed and I was afraid that the little lawyer would soon be holding forth again.

However, the second stranger said, " Terrible waste of time. Hours of solid climbing and nothing to show for it except a thirst."

And a small man at the end of the bar, whom I had not previously noticed, said, " You don't know what a waste of time is."

*Everyone turned towards the speaker.*

" Waste of time," he repeated. " Let me tell you of a waste of time which will make you feel that every moment of your climb was well spent."

Without waiting for an invitation to proceed, he went on, " It was a good many years ago and it happened in these parts. A detective was trailing a badly wanted criminal. He had almost caught up with him when the fellow went off into the mountains at night. It was moonlight and the detective, who was dead keen, went after him. By luck he sighted him against the sky and, after a scrambling climb, at last he got within hailing distance and called on the man to surrender. As he did so, the detective slipped and eventually found himself, by the mercy of God, with a sprained or broken ankle on a slightly projecting ledge. Below, a drop of hundreds of feet; above, almost sheer. He regretted his hasty pursuit and was wondering whether and when he would be rescued when he heard the criminal hailing him.

" ' Hullo, there,' said the criminal, ' I'll go and get a rope.'

" The detective said nothing for a moment and then he shouted, ' Are you William Turner? '

" ' Certainly.'

" ' I have a warrant for your arrest for the murder of Sidney Blunt.'

" ' Well, what are you going to do about it? ' asked Turner.

" ' You're under arrest now," said the detective.

" ' Doesn't feel like it,' said Turner.

" ' Now, look here,' said the detective, ' I naturally want to get out of here but I can't let you haul me out without telling you that I shall arrest you as soon as you do.' It will be seen that the detective had a peculiarly high standard of morals.

"'Oh, shut up,' said the criminal, whose morals were—except for the little matter of the murder—equally high. 'I'm going for a rope,' and he went away.

"Hours later he returned, when the detective had almost given him up. It had come on to rain during the night and rained incessantly next day, and no one had come into his sight since Turner left.

"'You still alive?' shouted Turner. 'I don't want to waste my time if you're not.'

"'Yes,' shouted the detective.

"'I'm afraid I'm by myself,' said Turner, 'but you'll understand that, in the circumstances.' The detective did understand, but he began to wonder how he could be rescued by one man alone—even with a rope.

"'You'll have to wait a bit,' said Turner, and began to make the descent.

"I won't describe the difficulties to experts like you gentlemen," said the speaker," but you may take it that even you would have found it a tough proposition. As it was, neither Turner nor the detective were real climbers and it was remarkable that Turner was able to reach the detective at all. However, after some time, he did so and threw one end of the rope to him. Now, whether the detective's ankle was broken or only sprained doesn't very much matter.

"You can perhaps visualise the appalling nature of their attempt to climb to safety. It required every ounce of strength and nerve each of them possessed.

"However, at long—very long—last their almost superhuman efforts—very different, I may say, from those needed for the little stroll you two gentlemen have just taken—were rewarded and they got to safety and stood looking at each other. The detective almost fainted as a result of the pain and exertion, but he just had enough strength to say, 'Thank you. I'm sorry . . .' and, with the last words, to aim a blow at Turner's jaw with the idea of knocking him out.

"He had, of course, realised that, unless he could do this, Turner would make good his escape.

"He had warned him that he would arrest him and, like a good detective, he felt bound to do so if he could. Unfortunately he had wholly insufficient strength to carry out his purpose and, as Turner avoided the blow, the detective lurched sideways and fell over the edge. As he was still roped to Turner, the latter was carried after him and they crashed to death hundreds of feet below. And you two gentlemen talk of a waste of time . . ."

"Very interesting," piped up the lawyer. Again, attention

was focused on him. "But d'you suggest that story is true?"

"Absolutely," said the small man gravely.

"Now, gentlemen," said the lawyer, "I think I can demonstrate to you conclusively that our friend here has been pulling your legs. The story can't be true." He paused and took the middle of the floor. "Now, sir, did I rightly understand you to infer that there were no witnesses of this accident?"

"Quite," said the small man.

"Did both men die instantaneously?"

"Quite."

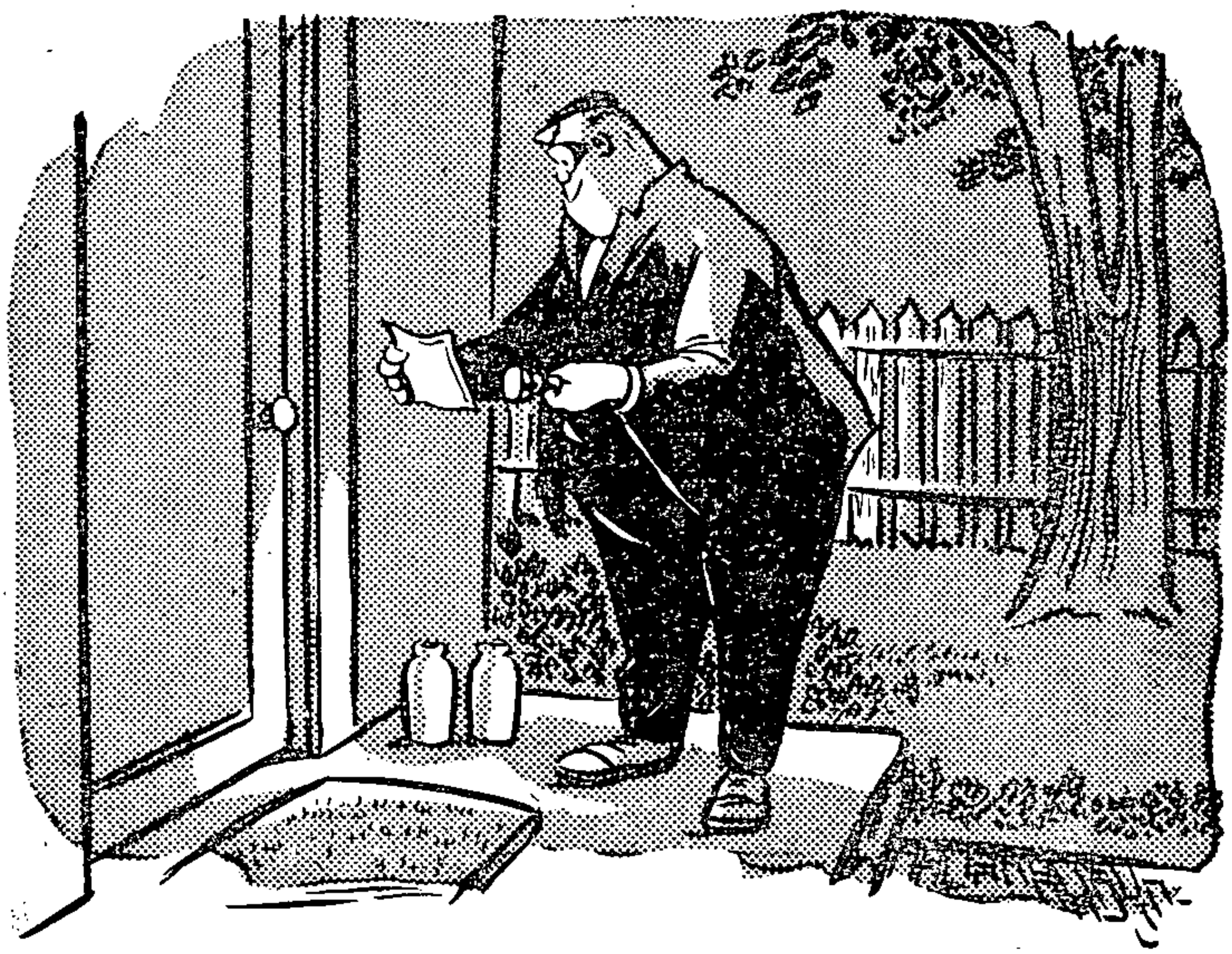
"Then," said the lawyer, "as no one saw them die and as they could have told their story to no one, you couldn't possibly know that it happened as you have told us."

He paused and gazed in triumph round his audience.

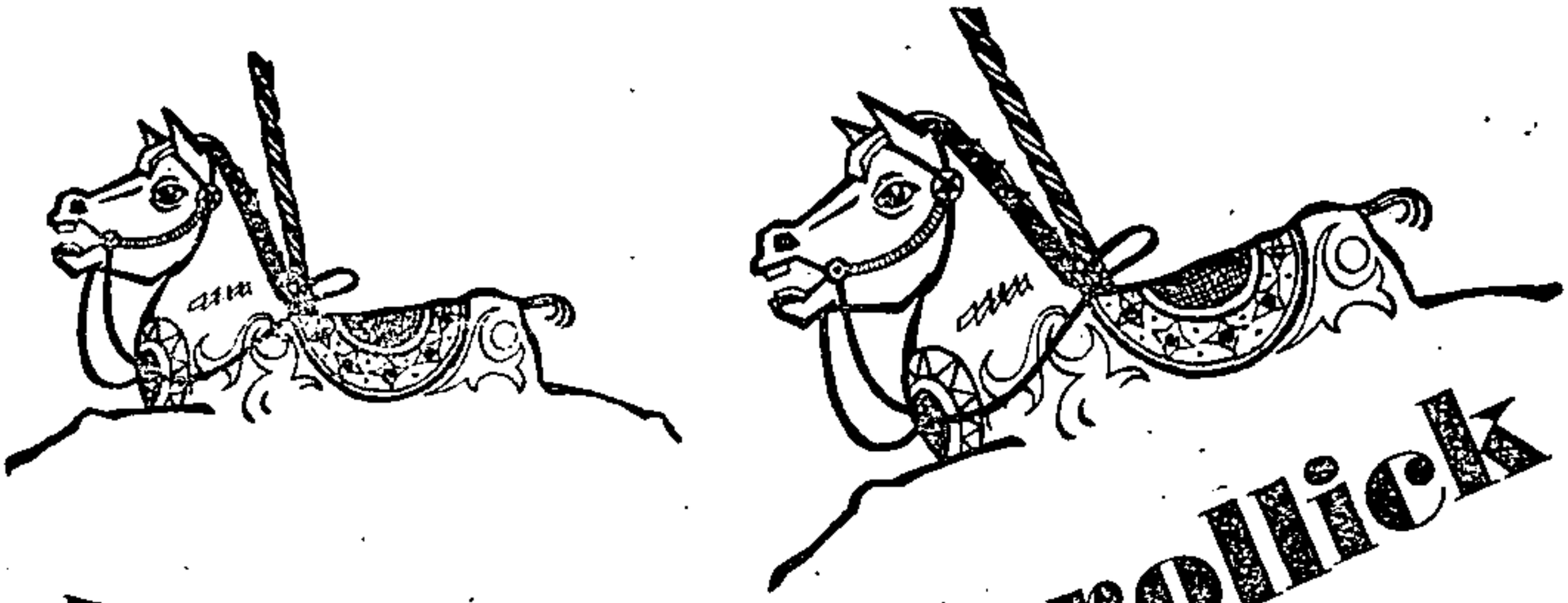
"Unless, of course," he added facetiously, "you chance to be the ghost of one of the men."

"Quite," said the small man and vanished. © Henry Cecil 1964

***Butch the Burglar***



"Dear Milkman, please discontinue milk deliveries for two weeks. We don't want bottles to pile up and become an invitation to burglars."



# roundabout rollick

**As I was going to Strawberry Fair**
**I met a maiden a-selling her ware,**
**Her eyes were blue, and golden her hair,**
**And we went on to Strawberry Fair . . .**

*He promised to bring me a pocket of posies,*
*A pocket of lilies, a pocket of roses,*
*But, dang it! the one thing that nobody knows is*
*Why Johnny's so long at the Fair!*
*Oh, there's girls on the Dodgems and girls on the Rollers,*
*There's belles in bikinis and beauties in bowlers,*
*There's sliders and skaters and screamers and strollers,*
*All chasing my John at the Fair.*
*It's odds he's been nabbled by one of those women*
*And has given the hussy my bunch of blue ribbon,*
*Next time it comes round, it's a pound to a shilling*
*I'll go with my John to the Fair!*

## *Beware the dark stranger*

They plunged into the thick of the fair, with all the warmth and the suggestion of packed humanity about them. Jem bought Mary a crimson shawl, and gold rings for her ears. They sucked oranges beneath a striped tent, and had their fortunes told by a wrinkled gypsy woman. "Beware of a dark stranger," she said to Mary, and they looked at one another and laughed again . . . Flares streamed in the wind; the rain fell; and people ran hither and thither for shelter, laughing and calling to one another, the rain streaming from them.

Jem dragged Mary under cover of a doorway, his arms round her shoulders, and he turned her face against him, and held her with his hands, and kissed her. "Beware of the dark stranger," he said, and he laughed and kissed her again.

DAPHNE DU MAURIER, *Jamaica Inn*

## *Merry-go-round*

*All day where Megaphone*
*the gala tyrant booms,*
*twelve painted animals*
*wind up the clockwise dreams*
*of mounted cherubs with*
*brave eyes and comet curls,*
*while groundlings wait their turn*
*scuffing impatient heels.*
*Whirled like a star's cavalcade*
*they spin on a glittering core,*
*pumped by the hot serenade*
*their young blood could pirouette for—*
*ever and ever and ever and ever*
*O children ride the swan,*
*ride the zebra, ride*
*the only tiger you*
*are really safe upon. . .*

GLORIA RAWLINSON

## *Fair music*

There was something in all this, the noise of the steam-organ and the whirr of the switchback and the grind of the roundabout and the screams and the shouts and the chatter and the banging of the dodgem cars and the ping of the bullets striking the metal plate at the back of the booth and the baby crying and the woman saying, "And I said to her, Mrs. Amies, I said . . ." and the rattle of metal wheels on metal rails and the high voices chanting, "Seven balls for sixpence. Win a Prize and Win a Prize and Win a Prize!" which was ugly and strident and all mixed up and yet excited him . . .

"That isn't fair music," Peter said, "not that organ. It's all this. All the noises. That baby crying. The ping of the bullets."

They went to the centre of the fair and stood between the merry-go-round and the dodgem cars in what appeared an inferno of noise, of banging, grinding, screaming, chanting, roaring. Peter Ambrose stood with his face lifted up to the sky and his eyes closed, listening to what appeared to Miss Oxley as an ear-splitting babel of sounds.

"Hullo! Miss Oxley!" bawled Wally Stubbs. "Goodbyee!" He sailed past riding up and down on an orange, purple, and ultramarine ostrich . . .

ARTHUR CALDER MARSHALL, *The Fair to Middling*

*The Fancy Fair! The Fancy Fair!*
*The fair I fancy governs there;*
*And fairest of the fair is she*
*Who don't deny she fancies me.*
*Among the fair sex recollect*
*Fair dealings you must not expect;*
*What ever trash is to be sold*
*They give no change for notes or gold!*

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY, 1857

## *Fire-eater*

And there was no denying that Saint Giles' Fair was exciting. It was like a miniature town, with hundreds of booths set out under the blazing sun, and narrow grassy alleys winding between them like the lanes of a city. The booths had bright awnings over the top of them, coloured orange and red and green, as protection from sun and rain, and under the awnings were spread unimaginable glories. There were flowers and fruit, pouncet boxes, hawks' bells, dog whistles, coloured kerchiefs, trinkets, garters, shoes, aprons, and every possible luxury that could tempt the eyes of the grown-ups. There were things for the children too, popguns and hobby horses and drums and kites, and wonderful things to eat such as gilt gingerbread and pepper-mint drops at twenty a penny . . .

Now and again the lanes of the Fair converged, like those of a real city, upon an open square, and here there would be a side-show or an entertainment. Diccon stared with all his eyes at a fire-eater who appeared to be chewing up glowing coals as though they were so much gingerbread, at a performing dog who could walk round on his hind legs balancing a tankard of ale on his nose, at a cat with two heads and a calf with a tail sticking out in the middle of its forehead.

ELIZABETH GOUDGE, *Towers in the Mist*

## *After the Fair*

*My young love said to me: "My kinfolk won't mind,*
*And my brothers won't blame you for your lack of kind."*
*She put her arms round me, and this she did say,*
*"It will not be long, love, till our wedding day."*
*She turned away from me, and she moved through the fair,*
*As the swan in the evening moves here and moves there,*
*And she took her way homeward, with one star awake,*
*As the swan in the evening moves over the lake.*

***Ballad***

# Lease of a Gold-banded Pen

## BY JOAN AIKEN

THIS, you know, will not do," said Edwin Luffington. "It will not do at all." He gazed distastefully at the arched brick roof, from which a greenish drip occasionally fell to the floor. "My dear David—I may call you David?—we must get you out of here."

"Why? I've been here for a year. It's handy."

"It is quite unsuitable for a man in your position."

There was nothing particularly striking about David Glendower's immediate position: he was seated on two orange boxes and making use of two more as a desk. His room, an enclosed arch under a viaduct in Kentish Town, was neatly furnished with a series of shelves piled high with manuscripts, and a bed, all constructed from further orange boxes; at two shillings a box they must have represented some five pounds' worth of outlay. The floor was muddy.

"What rent do you pay?"

"Five shillings a week."

"You can afford more than that now," Luffington pointed out. "How long has *A Nice Drop of Rain* been running?"

David glanced at a grubby theatrical poster and did some calculation on his fingers. "Nearly ten months."

"And *The Night Sky in May* opens next week?"

"I believe so. Really, I must hurry up and finish *Chips in Coromandel*," said David, looking as if he wished that his visitor would leave.

"And we've only just managed to find out where you live," sighed Luffington, who represented a famous firm of literary and theatrical agents. "Really, Mr. Glendower—David—you keep yourself very well hidden away. Weren't you even interested to discover the amount in your bank balance?"

"I don't seem to need money much," said David.

Luffington eyed him with disapproval. "You must get a new suit. And a new flat. Don't you understand, people want to meet you?"

"Oh really, I haven't time to hunt for flats," David protested. "I'm just at the crucial point in the second act; people must take me as they find me. And I'd just as soon they didn't find me."

"As to flats, you need have no worries at all," Luffington said calmly and firmly. "In fact there isn't any need to hunt. Another of our authors is abroad at the moment and I happen to know hers is available, furnished, on a year's lease. It will suit you excellently: a ground-floor flat in Curzon Street with a garden. And the rent is well within your present means. You can move in tomorrow; I will come at ten with the office Bentley and help you move—you appear to have very little luggage—"

"Will there be room for my shelves? I don't want my papers to get into a muddle."

"No, there will not." Luffington cast a disparaging glance at the orange boxes. "But I can assure you the flat is amply furnished with cupboards, desks and bureaux. And I myself will help you pack your manuscripts."

"There are forty-nine plays and seven sonnet sequences," David warned him. "This flat you speak of—" his tone was apprehensive—"I'll have to keep it dusted and tidy?"

"Don't worry about any of that," Luffington soothed him. "The butler goes with the lease. He'll take care of you."

"*Butler?*"

"An old family retainer," Luffington explained indulgently. "The flat belongs to Louise Bonaventure. You must have seen her television programme—or, no, I suppose you may not have," he added, as his gaze trailed down the damp walls to the candle in its saucer. "She travels in remote countries looking for rare birds. Her programme is called *Parlour Treks*. She's away at the moment, on Whitsun Island, I believe. That's all, I think," Luffington ended briskly. "I'll be here tomorrow morning to pick you up."

He departed: a willow-thin young man, wearing the very latest collarless haddock-skin jacket, with eyes as cold and intelligent as panel-lights.

David sighed, went back to his writing, and in two minutes had forgotten the visitor . . .

The flat in Curzon Street was furnished and carpeted in the most elegant taste, but David, next day, hardly took it in, beyond

noticing tiers of well-filled bookshelves with absent-minded approval. Sitting down at a large, comfortable desk, he pulled a pencil and notebook from his pocket, and had to be forcibly dragged away by Luffington to meet the lawyers and sign the lease.

Luffington rapidly read the document aloud. "Property on the ground-floor of number tiddle-tum three, Curzon Street, hereinafter known as The Property, together with all fixtures, furnishings, fittings, appurtenances, trum, trum, trum, trum, shall be . . ." David's attention drifted away. Could Luffington really have read "live and dead stock" or was that a phrase dimly recollected from the long-ago day when Glendower senior was sold up as a bankrupt? ". . . Subject to quarterly inspection by the lessor or the lessor's agents, trum, trum, trum, trum . . . Shall retain the services of HENRY WADSWORTH OGLETHORPE as butler at a salary not less than . . . lease shall be subject to the approval of the hereinbeforementioned HENRY WADSWORTH OGLETHORPE . . ."

"Just a formality," little Mr. Nipchick the lawyer was murmuring apologetically. "Miss Bonaventure was very anxious to ensure that the flat should be sublet to somebody, as she put it, on the same wavelength as herself. The ladies, bless them, have these fancies. She places the utmost reliance on the judgment of Oglethorpe, who has been butler to her family since she was a child—"

"I've got to meet this Oglethorpe and be approved by him?" David came back from Act II with an effort.

"If you don't mind, sir."

"Where is he?"

"In the kitchen. I'll just—"

"I'll go myself. Through here, the kitchen?" He laid his finger in the notebook and folded Act II round it.

A plump fatherly man sat at the spotless table oiling a seventeenth-century musical-box. He had the ideal face for a butler: platter-shaped and pastry-coloured, with shrewd friendly eyes.

"You are Henry Wadsworth Oglethorpe? Good morning; I believe you have to approve me. Just excuse me a moment, though, will you," David said courteously, and wrote half a dozen lines in his notebook, raising his head once to add, "My name's David Glendower, by the way."

"Mr. David Glendower, the playwright, sir?" Oglethorpe went placidly on with his task. "You needn't have troubled, sir, if I'd known that. Miss Bonaventure has a very high opinion of your play, and so have I, Mr. David; I've seen it twice."

"Oh, well, that's fine then. Very glad to make your acquaintance. What a beautiful musical-box."

"It's a fine one, isn't it, sir. Miss Louise collects them. Would you care to hear it play?"

It played *Can Ye Sew Cushions*, very sweetly and hauntingly, and then went on to *The Lass of Aberystwyth*.

"I know some words to that one," said David, and supplied them in an agreeable tenor. Oglethorpe unexpectedly added the bass, and when, after twenty minutes, Luffington and Mr. Nipchick came in search of them, they had worked their way through to *The Ash Grove*, with falsetto cadenzas by David.

Brought back rather impatiently to business by Mr. Nipchick, David signed the lease, and the two men of affairs then took their departure, Luffington promising to return and escort David to a good tailor.

"Before then, sir, I'll get Mr. Glendower something off the peg," Oglethorpe suggested, measuring David with his eye, "for he can't be seen at Padrith and Kneale in *that* suit. And," he added, as the front door closed behind Luffington, "in the meantime, how about a nice hot bath, sir? The bathroom's through there. While you're having it, I'll just pop out and get the suit—a Lovat I think would be suitable, Mr. David—and then I'll bring you up a light, early lunch, shall I, and you can get straight back to your writing. An omelet and a bottle of Haut Brion?"

"Yes—all right—" said David, steered neatly and inexorably in the direction of the bathroom, where Oglethorpe had already started the hot water running. He felt vaguely that he was being remoulded, but since there was no possible chance that this could upset his interior self, he did not particularly mind; the process, in Oglethorpe's capable hands, was rather comfortable. Certainly a hot bath was a luxury he had not encountered for years, and most acceptable, though he found Miss Bonaventure's bathroom, with its swansdown etceteras, dark-green marble walls, and sunk bath, alarmingly sybaritic.

Halfway through his bath, as he lay idly pushing the soap about with one toe and trying over lines of dialogue aloud—accoustically the room was superb—something rather disconcerting occurred.

A flash of movement caught his eye from a carved alabaster bracket by the window, on which reposed what he had taken to be a carved alabaster swan with its head tucked under its wing. Turning rather sharply he now saw that the swan had thrust its neck forward, so that the head just protruded from under the wing, and was regarding him with a black, beady, and inscrutable eye.

David started so violently that a tidal wave slopped over the

edge of the bath. Swans are baleful and unpredictable creatures at best, even when viewed from the comparative vantage-point of rowboat or towing-path; to meet a swan when oneself recumbent, totally unclad, immersed, and on a very much lower level is an unnerving experience. David glanced towards the bathroom door, gauging his distance from it, but the swan forestalled him by spreading a pair of wings with a span of about eight feet and gliding to a point midway between bath and door. There it settled, tucking its flappers neatly underneath, curving its neck into a meticulous S-bend, and fixing its flat eyes on David.

With such an audience, there was no pleasure in further soaking. Indeed, it seemed alarmingly possible that the bird might elect to share the bath with him. David dried himself hurriedly.

Oglethorpe had removed his clothes and left him a turkish-towelling robe which afforded highly inadequate protection against swan-bite. However this swan's manner, though watchful, did not appear to be actively hostile. When David gingerly skirted round it to reach the door it swivelled its head, keeping the flat black eyes trained on him like a pair of A.A. guns, but allowed him to leave in an orderly manner.

He found Oglethorpe in his bedroom laying out the new suit, together with socks, underwear, shirt, tie, and handkerchief, all selected with severely professional discrimination as adornments for the image of a rising young playwright.

"Oglethorpe."

"Yes, Mr. David?"

"What is that swan doing in the bathroom?"

"It seems to like it in there, sir, when the weather's chilly. I suppose it's natural enough; the presence of the water, you know. If you will not be requiring another bath this afternoon I will fill it with cold; it serves nicely as an indoor paddling pool."

"But what is the swan doing here at *all*?"

"It's in the lease, sir; didn't you read it? Furniture, fittings, appurtenances, and one swan, care of the aforesaid swan to be undertaken by the hereinaftermentioned Henry Wadsworth Oglethorpe."

"I've got to share this flat with a swan?"

"It is a very valuable bird, sir," Oglethorpe assured him, with a faint touch of reproof. "Not just a common swan; a gold-banded swan of Izbanistan."

"Miss Bonaventure brought it back from there, I suppose. Why isn't it at the zoo?"

"That wouldn't do at all, sir. It's a very particular bird."

"Bad-tempered?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say so, Mr. David." Was there a hint of reserve in Oglethorpe's manner? "Keeps itself to itself, in general. When the weather's fine, of course, it will be out in the garden."

David now understood why the garden, a charming little court with a grape arbour and a fig tree, should be three-quarters filled with a large and evidently new pool. Presumably this was for the benefit of the swan.

"What sex?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The swan? Male or female?"

Oglethorpe answered repressively that the bird was a pen, and folded David's handkerchief into a neat geometrical figure. "I'll bring your lunch in ten minutes, Mr. David."

While Oglethorpe was in the kitchen David searched for and found Miss Bonaventure's dictionary, and learnt that the pen was the female swan.

Would she be better or worse-tempered than her mate? Probably it depended on the presence or absence of eggs.

The omelet was delicious and the wine mellow; nevertheless lunch would have been a more cheerful meal if the swan had not chosen to trundle, slowly and with dignity, into the dining-room and sit on the dumb-waiter, following the progress of every bite into David's mouth. He tried a placatory offer of toast-fingers, but this was aloofly ignored.

As soon as possible he hurried back to work in the study and heard slow, flapping footsteps behind him. Then there was a sort of flurry, and Oglethorpe's voice, low but firm, "The gentleman is busy with his writing and doesn't want to be bothered. I'll fill the bath and you can have a nice swim."

Feeling rather mean, David closed the study door. Halfway through the afternoon—Act II was not going well—he felt obliged to tiptoe along to the bathroom and peer through the crack of the door. The swan was in the bath, sailing about above her reflection, and preening her back with brisk, housewifely jabs of the beak.

She seemed contented enough, but was there a slight droop to her neck as if she knew she had been rebuffed?

Conscience-stricken, David left the study door open on his return, and, not long after, kept his head assiduously bent over his notebook as a slow slip-slop crossed the rush matting behind him. Had she dried her feet before leaving the bathroom?

At seven, Oglethorpe, gliding in to inquire about the evening meal, found the playwright scribbling away like mad while the swan, silent, impassive, but not unsympathetic, sat on a corner of his desk, pinning down a large pile of manuscripts.

"I've made a casserole, sir. Would you like it now, or should I keep it for a bit?"

"I'd like it now," said David, stretching his cramped hand. "I've done enough."

When Oglethorpe brought his after-dinner coffee he asked the swan's name.

"Miss Lou—that is, she hasn't exactly got a name, sir. Miss Louise never thought to name her before she went off."

"She ought to have a name. I shall call her Lucy Snowe," said David, thinking of the memorable sentence in *Villette*—"I, Lucy Snowe, was calm." Calmness seemed to be this Lucy's forte.

"Very good, sir. Shall you be wanting anything more?"

"No. Thanks, Oglethorpe. You're making me very comfortable," David said, looking from the peacefully glowing fire to the swan on the ebony concert grand with her head tucked under her wing. Surprising how quickly one became used to the presence of a swan in the room.

"It's a pleasure to look after you, Mr. David," said Oglethorpe unexpectedly, and closed the door gently behind him, leaving the silent pair to their own reflections.

A week passed. Chivvied by Luffington, David acquired a correct wardrobe, had a haircut that brought into view his

haggard good looks, and attended the first night of his new play, *The Night Sky in May*, which was an instant success.

With two plays running simultaneously, David Glendower became a celebrity and, if Luffington had had his way, would have appeared on countless public occasions and TV interviews. David, however, had a strong faculty of self-preservation which, coupled with Oglethorpe's quelling manner of answering the telephone or doorbell—"I am afraid Mr. Glendower is not available. I will inform him that you called. Thank you. *Good* day"—kept most of his admirers at bay.

One of them got through, however.

Everybody who knew Blair Lanaway described her as a horrible girl, "but," they were obliged to add, "she does have staying power." It was true, she had. To this, and not at all to the fact that she was an Hon., did she owe her job as gossip writer for *Fancy* magazine; she always got the information she was after, and it was generally admitted that she wrote the liveliest, knowingest, bitchiest column in the business. She had a round face with pushed-up, cushiony cheekbones, plum-black eyes, and a golliwog mop of hair; her loud laugh and her ringing, public-school tones were known from one end of Mayfair to the other end of Fleet Street.

The moment she laid eyes on David all her acquisitive instincts came into play.

David had the misfortune to twist his ankle coming down the theatre steps after a compulsory visit to the three hundredth night of *A Nice Drop of Rain*. Blair happened to be nearby; she swooped on him like a hen-harrier and insisted on driving him home in her horrid little car before he could extricate himself. Politeness dictated that David ask her in for a drink; as a matter of fact Miss Lanaway practically carried him over the threshold, to Oglethorpe's evident and deep disapproval.

Before David knew what was happening she had invited him to dinner at her flat the following night, promising to come and fetch him because of his ankle.

In years to come when David woke twitching from nightmares, he would remember that evening; Blair served him a hellish cocktail—he thought it might have been petrol and rosehip syrup with a pinch of phenobarbitone but was not certain; thereafter he sat in a state of stupor, trying and failing to call his wits to his aid. Blair curled herself up on the hearthrug and chattered gaily but as the evening progressed she moved closer and closer, until her elbows were on his knees and she was gazing intensely into his eyes; afterwards David could not clearly recall the sequence of events, although he was aware of Blair at about

midnight saying with a boyish laugh, " Why bother to go home? I'll blow up the airbed if you pine to sleep single."

" My butler will be worrying about me," David managed to articulate, trying to edge towards the door on his good foot.

" Bother your butler."

" And so will Lucy."

" Who's Lucy? " she said sharply.

" 'A maid whom there were none to praise, And very few to love.' Sorry, got into the wrong bit of lit. Thanks for a delightful evening," he said, finding the doorknob as thankfully as a drowning swimmer finds a rock.

She was so cross that she let him go and he managed to weave and hobble to the taxi-rank.

But the following evening she called at the flat in Curzon Street. As ill-luck would have it, Oglethorpe was out; it was his free evening and he was singing with the Aeolian Choir in a production of Haydn's *Creation*.

David answered the door.

Blair surged in past him, all generous sympathy, crying out, "You poor dear! Do you feel terrible after last night? Never mind, I forgive you! I've brought a bottle of Volga Dew for a pick-me-up. No Lucy? I knew you were pulling my leg."

" She's out in the garden," David said faintly.

" *Non*sense, darling, you're just a great big *storyteller*, aren't you? Here we are, clever little Blair's found two tumblers and a corkscrew, so let's be cosy."

David looked longingly towards the study, where Act III was waiting, but he did not know how to evict his unwelcome guest; he wondered how long it would be before Oglethorpe came home.

" Let's sit on the sofa," Blair said earnestly; " I want to talk to you about *contact*, David. For a man in your position, *contact* is so essential."

David wondered bemusedly what kind of contact she had in mind and reflected that people were always lecturing him about his position, which seemed to be deteriorating alarmingly; he felt homesick for the viaduct.

At this moment three loud raps sounded on the window. Blair shot upright, considerably startled.

" Who's that? " she demanded.

" It will be Lucy," David's tone was full of relief. " She's been swimming; I expect she wants her bath mat."

He opened the window and laid in front of the fire a thick square of red towelling. Lucy hoisted herself over the sill and stalked forwards to the mat, where she carefully dried each flipper

in turn. While she did so, however, she kept her head turned and her eyes trained on Blair; in general her expression was quite inscrutable, but at this moment it seemed to David that there was something of definite malignity in the look she was directing at the visitor.

Blair felt it too. She paled. "I—I don't go for swans much," she said nervously. "Of course it's *too* brilliant and original of you to keep one for a pet—we must get some shots for *Fancy*—but couldn't it sit in the kitchen or somewhere?"

"Dear me, no. Lucy always sits with me. I wouldn't hurt her feelings for worlds."

"What about *my* feelings?" demanded Blair angrily. "Am I expected to sit here with that—that *bird* staring at me?"

"Don't stay if you don't want to, of course," David replied with equanimity, suddenly finding that he had recovered all his lost ground. Lucy abetted him by choosing this moment to move slowly towards Blair with out-thrust neck, emitting a low but meaningful hiss which had a completely routing effect. Blair left precipitately amid tears and reproaches, and David was able to return to Act III, while Lucy perched on the arm of his chair and dangled a contented length of neck over his shoulder. It became plain that as a chaperon Lucy was invaluable. Soon she became almost as much of a celebrity as her temporary owner, and featured with him in many a double spread.

Two months passed peacefully by. January, however, brought a severe cold spell, with concomitant power cuts and fuel shortages.

David, hardened by years of sparse living, hardly felt the weather, but Lucy and Oglethorpe both suffered severely. Oglethorpe nonetheless continued to look after David solicitously, while his care for Lucy was touching: he made her gargle—a process by no means easy for swans—night and morning, fed her vitamin capsules by the handful, and, when necessary, helped her to inhale steaming turpentine, sitting with her under the towel to ensure her compliance. One evening, fancying she looked a little pink round the eyes, he went out in the snow to buy her some tincture of cinnamon, and this was his undoing; he caught a bad cold which turned to pneumonia, and the doctor insisted on his removal to hospital. He protested vehemently.

"Don't worry, please don't worry," David exhorted him. "I'll look after the flat and keep everything dusted; you just concentrate on getting better."

"And Miss Lucy—you'll look after Miss Lucy?" begged Oglethorpe. "If anything happened to her I don't know what—"

His voice broke and he was obliged to turn his head away on the stretcher.

"I'll do everything you did, I swear," David reassured him. "Vitamin C, blackcurrant purée, quinine, hot-water bottles, the lot."

For a week, all went well. Then, when the thermometer shot down to twenty-six degrees of frost, the electricity authorities inflicted a forty-eight-hour cut. The temperature in David's flat gradually sank to arctic conditions, frost glistened on the walls, the bath froze; Lucy's outdoor pool had frozen solid long ago. For the first day David managed to keep himself and Lucy warm by burning coal-dust and branches filched from Green Park, and filling hot-water bottles from kettles boiled on a spirit stove. On the second evening Lucy sneezed twice, and David noticed that she had begun to shiver. He filled an extra bottle and wrapped an eiderdown round her, but she shivered still, and he stared at her in worried perplexity. It was plain that she must not spend the night in such a state.

The solution he finally adopted seemed the only one possible. He piled all the bedding in the flat on his own bed, put all the hot bottles into it, administered an immense tot of brandy to Lucy and took one himself, then, grasping her firmly round her feathery middle, he wriggled into bed and went to sleep. It occurred to him drowsily in the middle of the night that he should have done this sooner; their combined warmth, and Lucy's feathers, produced an almost tropical temperature under the layers of quilts and blankets.

When he woke next morning he looked beside him on the pillow, expecting to see black beady eyes and an elegant red beak. Instead, to his astonished dismay, he found an unmistakably feminine profile: that of a fair-haired, distinguished woman, whom, if he had been a student of television, he would have recognised as Louise Bonaventure.

She opened her eyes and regarded him sleepily.

"How do you do?" she said. "I'm your landlady."

He pressed his knuckles to his forehead. "How—how did you get here?" he asked.

"It's a long story." Louise stretched luxuriously, sat up, and stepped briskly out of bed. "Let's have some coffee first, shall we? Is the power back? Yes, thank goodness. How delicious coffee smells—it must be a year since I tasted any. Oh, you want to know how I got here? I was the swan, of course."

"*Lucy?* My Lucy Snowe?"

Miss Bonaventure had the grace to look a little conscious. "I suppose I should apologise. You see I had collected a pair of

Abominable Snow Geese in the mountains of Izbanistan, and the Imam found out and was annoyed about it, said I had no right to; ridiculous of him, they aren't at all rare over there, common as starlings; so in revenge he purloined one of my pair, had me turned into a swan by his top lama, a very accomplished magician, and popped me into the crate instead. If it hadn't been for Oglethorpe, who very intelligently put two and two together, I should probably have ended my life in the London Zoo."

"But what broke the spell?"

She blushed faintly.

"Oh, it was the old Frog-Prince solution, you know; I do hope you haven't caught my cold, by the way?"

"Ought I to marry you?" David asked diffidently. "Do you feel you've been—compromised?"

She gave him a somewhat baffling glance, but merely remarked, "There's no obligation about it—except on my side. I really am extremely grateful to you, and you've been an admirable tenant."

"Shall you want the flat back now?" David felt totally confused and instinctively kept the conversation on a businesslike level.

"Not immediately." Miss Bonaventure's fine eyes flashed. "First I shall fly to Izbanistan for another goose. I'm not going to be done by that old trickster of an Imam. But now let's go to the hospital and see Oglethorpe."

Oglethorpe's delight at the restoration of his mistress was touching to behold. Tears of joy stood in his eyes. "It's made me better just to see you," he kept declaring. "And you won't go back to those unreliable foreign parts any more, will you, Miss Louise?"

"Only to get another snow goose, Henry dear. I must have a pair."

"Then I shall come too," the old man declared. He overbore all her objections, and insisted on her waiting till he was well enough to accompany her.

Two weeks after the travellers had left, David suddenly realised how bereft he was without them: no Oglethorpe to sing duets of an evening, no sage advice as to ties and shirts, no imperturbable barrier against the outside world, and, worse still, no Lucy Snowe. Only now did he understand how much he had come to need her cool and silent presence; without her he could hardly write.

He sent a cable to catch her at Bombay: WILL YOU MARRY ME?

She replied: YES OF COURSE DUNDERHEAD BUT MUST FIRST SECURE SPECIMEN MEET ME HERE ON RETURN FROM IZBANISTAN.

Overjoyed, David set sail. By the time he reached Bombay, he calculated, Louise's mission should be accomplished and nothing would stand in their way.

He reckoned without the Imam of Izbanistan.

When he reached the Taj Mahal hotel, almost the first person he saw was Oglethorpe, looking travel-worn and harassed.

"Oglethorpe! You're back! Is Miss Louise here?"

"Oh, Mr. David, how glad I am to see you. Yes, she's back, but—"

"Did you get the goose?"

"Yes, we got it, but—"

"What's the trouble? Louise isn't hurt?"

"No, no, nothing like that, sir, but the Imam's been up to his magical tricks again."

"Turned her into a swan? Well, we know how to deal with that now," David said confidently.

"Yes, well, it's a bit *worse* this time, Mr. David. However, you'd best come and see for yourself. I'm really relieved you're here; I wasn't sure how long the hotel management were going to stand for it."

He led the way by lifts and corridors to a bedroom door which shook and rattled as if a minor but prolonged earthquake were taking place in the room beyond. Chambermaids and hotel officials stood some distance away, eyeing the door uneasily.

As David and Oglethorpe walked down the passage there came an awe-inspiring crash from inside the bedroom, and the door bulged outwards as if it had been hit by something large and angry, and about the size of a double-decker bus.

The latch held, but only just.

Oglethorpe gave David a last doubtful look.

"You're still sure you want to go ahead, Mr. David?"

"Of course I am! Open the door, man!" David was pale, but resolute.

So Oglethorpe opened the door . . .

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BIRO

# *Bishop Quinn and Lucifer*

## BY TAYLOR CALDWELL

BISHOP QUINN was thinking of the terrible vision he had had one day at Mass, and of the Famine, and the riots, and the men and women who staggered through the countryside with their children, looking for an unblighted potato or a piece of bread. And of the two hundred young men and women waiting for death in the Dublin prisons and of the hanging judge and the scaffolds prepared.

It was almost more than the Bishop could bear.

Never was there a lovelier man than the ould Bishop, his dear lordship, less than five feet in his boots with the heel on them to make him taller, and towering like a giant in his soul. You'd have thought him a saint from the cradle except for the gleam in his bright black eye and the big roaring laugh he had. But now he prayed constantly. He wept his painful old tears, he struggled with rebellion, he was contrite, and he would be comforted. But at the very instant of the coming of comfort he would see the stern and desperate young faces in the prisons, and hear the weeping and the prayers.

The young people had been fighting for their lives and food, but more than all else they had been fighting for their right to blessed freedom and the right to worship their God in peace and without fear, and to have their country, which God had given them for their own.

The winter was extremely severe. Bishop Quinn was eighty-four, and the few pieces of peat on the hearth gave but little warmth to his old and shivering bones. He had no money to buy quantities of fuel, and he was intolerably hungry, for he had not eaten for twenty-four hours. The hour was ten at night and the snow and wind were blowing, and Eileen, his sister, had fallen into her bed in exhaustion and tears and weakness.

The Bishop, this night, was in more agony than usual, and praying in catches of breath. The light of his one lamp, in his small parlour, was very low, and so was the oil. He put his hands

over his face and rocked in his sorrow. Then, all at once, he felt that he was not alone, and he dropped his withered hands and looked up with a bounding of his heart.

A young and very handsome man was sitting near him across the faint red light of the hearth. He was the most beautiful young man the Bishop had ever seen. He was also beautifully clad, in check pantaloons of rakish cut, and his waistcoat was of lovely brocaded silk in a red and green embroidery, and his black broadcloth coat was of the finest, his cravat of black silk pinned with a stone that glowed like fire. His figure was patrician and elegant and tall, his shoulders excellent, his white hands gleaming with gems. But his face held the startled Bishop's full attention. It was dark, as dark as a Spaniard's or even darker, and it had a classic splendour, with a full brow, a chiselled nose, and a red-lipped mouth and sharp cheekbones and dimpled chin.

His eyes were extraordinary, like jewels themselves, and of the deepest and most shining blue, like the sky just at sunset. His hair was curling and dark and luxuriant.

The young man was smiling charmingly, and there was an expression of sympathy on his grand face, and though he was young his eyes held the shadows of centuries of grief and rage and hate, for all their innocent colour and shape, and he appeared very wise. He had the air of a mighty prince, mightier than any emperor or king, and the look of power and invulnerable pride and certitude.

So the Bishop, staring, knew exactly who he was, and he knew that this was no lesser demon, but Lucifer, himself, full of grandeur and terrible strength.

The Bishop's heart was loud in his ears, and thudding and trembling, and all his pulses throbbed in his hunger-stricken body. He knew the greatest terror of his life.

"Don't be afraid, my lord," said Lucifer, and his voice was like rolling music. "I see you know me. You are a very astute man. Do I seem very formidable to you, in all truth?"

The Bishop's mouth and lips and throat were as dry as dust. "But this is just an apparition of you," he whispered. "You do not truly look like this." His mind and his wits swirled; he tried to remember prayers and exorcisms, but they were like dropping water in his thoughts.

Lucifer cocked an indulgent eyebrow, and his face glowed. "And how do you know I do not look like this, my lord? After all, I am an archangel, and I was considered the most beautiful of all—by Him: I was also the most beloved. Or have you forgotten?"

Now, like all devout churchmen, the Bishop had often thought of Lucifer, this tremendous angel who had fallen from heaven and who was still an archangel.

"But," said the Bishop, "you are a spirit; you are purely spirit. How can I see with my eyes of flesh?" He clenched his tiny hands together, and trembled even more.

"Come, come," said Lucifer. "Men have often seen me,

through the ages. You have read of that. But perhaps you do see me with your eyes of flesh, and with the eyes of your soul also. Am I as fearful as you have heard, and as ghastly?"

The Bishop looked at him fully again. He admitted, "No. But then, you take many forms, I have heard. You seem like a young man in his pride of youth—"

"I am in the pride of my youth. Archangels do not age." Lucifer was amused. "It is true that I have appeared to men in the guises they found the most familiar, and so they were disarmed, but they clothed me with their imaginations. You see me as I am, for you are an old man and you have never lied in your life, and have no delusions."

"It is true," said the Bishop, "you are very handsome. But—"

"Women have always found me so," said Lucifer. "I am irresistible to endless multitudes of them. Men have found me congenial, from the very beginning. I am much less unbending than—Him." As he said that word his face burned more darkly, as if with inner fire. "I understand mankind, though—He—took on your flesh and lived among you. He understood men, but how many men have understood—Him? He humiliated Himself to the cross and to death, forgotten by those He had loved and saved, abandoned by His friends. I tell you, my lord: once men have known me and accepted me, they have never forgotten me!"

He held up his palm to the quaking Bishop, who, however, was humanly curious and whose heart was calming. "I have helped millions in their direst hours, when their prayers were unheard by—Him. I have never failed to respond to a man's cry, when he called to me. But millions have not heard His voice—in answer—nor have they been helped."

"That is a lie!" cried the Bishop. "You know it is a lie! Our Lord called you the father of lies, a liar from the beginning!"

"But, His Father mourned me," said Lucifer, and for a single instant there was the most profound and supernatural anguish on his beautiful face. "He called me Star of the Morning. I stood at His hand, and knew His glory—and I loved Him. I saw Him face to face; I knew the Beatific Vision. Tell me, my lord, has there been a man on this world, of which I am Prince, who can say that with truth?"

"No," admitted the Bishop. He thought for a few moments. "You have told me you loved Him. How, then, could you have rebelled against God, and declared yourself His enemy?"

Lucifer smiled very faintly, and with a contempt beyond the contempt of men.

"Your theologians, my lord, have pondered that, and have tried to explain it. They never will. That is between me—and Him." Again the anguish charged his face and all at once the Bishop fully knew the horror of hell, and the torment of it, and the loneliness. This tremendous archangel was the terror, the awful adversary of all that lived, but his grief was beyond all imagination, and perhaps greater than his hatred.

"I must ask you," said Lucifer, "not to speak of Him again to me." Lucifer's face was so terrible now that the Bishop felt that he was about to be consumed and disintegrated by its glow.

But he said, "Had you been as wise—and what blasphemy that is!—you'd never—" But the presence seemed to expand, to swell, and for a terrifying instant to fill every corner of the room, the howling world outside, the very universe. The Bishop shrank in his chair.

"What do you want of me?" he whispered. "I, a poor Bishop in my sorrow?"

"I want—you know what I want," said Lucifer, who was again the most handsome man in the world, the most genial, the most charming, the most sympathetic and elegant.

"My soul!" cried the Bishop, and fumbled for his pectoral cross. Lucifer's eye saw the movement, and saw the cross, and his dark face darkened even more. He put up his hand against it, as if it shone like the sun. The jewels on his fingers appeared living, each one quivering with sentient life and throwing showers of coloured sparks into the little room.

"Your soul," said Lucifer, and dropped his hand. He was smiling again.

"How was it possible to come into my house?" said the Bishop, having another thought. "I was in the midst of my prayers—"

"I am able to go anywhere," said Lucifer. "And I usually interrupt men in their prayers. For how dare men speak to—" He paused. "If there is blasphemy, surely that is the most intolerable of them all. Intolerable." All at once there was a most savage and enraged glitter in the splendid blue eyes, and the Bishop shrank and fumbled for his cross.

"But let us discuss our affairs," said Lucifer, and he was again the most engaging of apparitions. "Your soul."

"Don't be ridiculous," said the Bishop, and even in his dread and fear he was indignant. "My soul is not for you, and if you were as wise as my poor baker you would know that."

"You were a very sinful and violent young man when you fought for Ireland many years ago," said Lucifer. "I never forget such men. I was often close to you in those days. I am close to you again, tonight."

The Bishop blessed himself hurriedly. Lucifer watched with fresh indulgence. "You were in despair tonight," he said. "And despair is a cry to me. Or is your memory failing again, my lord?"

"I was not in despair for myself," said the Bishop. He could hear the ticking of his clock on the mantel, very loud, very hurried, as if it had gone a little mad. He could hear the gale against the windows; it seemed filled with multitudes of lost and wailing voices, screams and cries and implorings.

"You were in despair for the sake of those foolish young men and women who will assuredly die in a week or so," said Lucifer. "If you had faith you should not have wept so and been so unconsoled."

" I have faith," said the Bishop. He could not take his attention from the rushing voices in the gale, and he was trembling until his clothing shook and all his flesh.

" Then with your faith, go to the prisons, demand that they be opened at a single word, and deliver the imprisoned," said Lucifer. " Did not—there was some mention, was there not, that faith even as small as a mustard seed could move mountains? "

The Bishop was silent.

" You do not have that faith, that is why I have come to you."

" There is such a thing as God's will," said the Bishop, and his old face was resolute and grey. " If it be His will—"

" You were not satisfied with His probable will," said Lucifer, " and that is why you were wrestling in your prayers. You did not pray, ' Thy will be done.' You prayed that it would not be done —but that your friends would be saved."

Then the Bishop knew that he had reached the ancient paradox of man's prayer: " Thy will be done—but do not will it! " He pondered on that, too.

" I was not asking anything for myself," he said at last. " I was asking mercy for others, if it be His will."

" Were you? " asked Lucifer. " I listened to you for a long time. You said nothing about—will. You asked for mercy."

" We are permitted that. We are urged to pray for that."

" We are getting nowhere," said Lucifer, with impatience. " I am very direct in my ways, and you are discourteous, for I asked you not to speak again of—Him. Your young people will die, in spite of your prayers, unless you are willing to sacrifice yourself for them. And did not—was there not a sacrifice—to save many more than these? Would you baulk at a much lesser sacrifice? "

Then the Bishop knew that he was being most subtly tempted by the most terrible and subtle tempter of them all. Lucifer, it appeared, did not always tempt men through their evil nature, but by the deepest impulses and the noblest sentiments which can live in the heart of humanity. He exploited the best that was in a man, and the most sacrificial. He implied to man that he could do what God would not do, or could not do. And the man who listened—

*Lucifer was a liar. He could no longer speak truth.* The Bishop, reassured, drew a deep and shuddering breath. " You could not save those young folk."

" You have forgotten. I always keep my promises. There is not the smallest legend that, having given my word to do what is desired, I did not keep it."

The Bishop had to admit that to himself. He could not remember a pact with the Devil which had not been kept. For a price.

It was very confusing. He could see the faces of those in prison, and could hear their weeping again. He could hear their voices in the gale. They tore at his heart. His eyes filled with tears.

He was so distracted that when he felt something brushing against his knee he started violently and looked down. It was

only Mustard, the ginger cat, fat and huge, whom Eileen had named, with fond youthful memories of the time when her old brother, the Bishop, then but a spalpeen, a fighting broth of a lad, had been called Mustard.

Mustard, like all her ancient and aristocratic tribe, had her own fancies and her own bullying manners and disdains. Eileen kept her not so much as a pet as for her redoubtable way with mice and rats. (Mustard, at this time, was the only plump member of the family). Consequently there was esteem and respect between those the Bishop called "my two colleens." A lover of animals, the Bishop had greeted the advent of Mustard as a kitten, some five years ago, with enthusiasm and with endearing cries, and Mustard knew at once that she need not woo him but could manage him nicely and bully him out of titbits by a mere whine. She kept her leg-brushing for Eileen, and her lap-leaping for her mistress, and all her purrs. She rarely even bothered to turn her head in the direction of her clerical servant, and affected to ignore his presence at all times.

The chair in which Lucifer was now sitting was Mustard's by right of appropriation. She permitted only Eileen to sit in it, and then would curl herself on her mistress' knees before the fire. Once the Bishop had absently dropped into it and Mustard had snarled like a tiger and crouched for the charge, all her ginger hair bristling and her golden eyes filled with fire. Since then he had avoided the chair. And she had never sat in his nor approached him voluntarily except when she decided that some rare delicacy he was eating should be shared with her.

"Mustard," murmured the Bishop weakly, as the cat pressed herself against his legs. Even in this disastrous hour he could feel surprise that she had approached him. The pressure against his leg became heavier and stronger, for Mustard was not only big but she was powerful, and all at once the Bishop remembered the dog he had had as a boy who would press himself like this against his little master when he had felt his master was threatened. It was incredible, thought the Bishop, vaguely, that Mustard, who was a cat and who disdained him, should lean against him as if protecting—

Mustard's head and shoulders extended beyond the Bishop's knee. Her back was arched stiffly and powerfully; her neck was stretched in Lucifer's direction and her great mouth was opened in a tigerish snarl and from her throat there issued a guttural and savage sound. Her golden eyes shimmered in the faint firelight, and they were distended and filled with hate, rage, and fear. Her long thick tail was twice its size, and twitching ominously.

If the Bishop had thought, a few times tonight, that he was suffering from hallucinations because of hunger and grief, he no longer thought it. For Mustard was definitely seeing Lucifer and all his danger and terror. She was definitely protecting her old clerical admirer, and preparing to give her life for his if necessary, a most uncatlike resolution. She was horribly frightened; her stiff

body was full of tremors. Nevertheless, she was threatening Lucifer—she, a mere haughty cat busy with the affairs of her life. Her snarling voice, brave and without a whine, was challenging the mighty adversary.

" My cat," murmured the Bishop, " seems to see you."

" So she does," said Lucifer, staring at the animal. " But then, all animals see the unseen; it is only man, with his muddy eyes, who sees darkly. Yet—He—dishonoured the glory He had created by giving not only life to the image of mud but giving it a soul also! And then dying for it! Yet rare has been the man who has possessed the valour, the decency, the honour, the majesty and dignity, and the innocence, of even the least important of animals. The vilest of the vile is man and his history is written in the blood of his fellows.

"I tempted man, it is said. It needed little temptation! Not even the most starving and the most lowly curs would have succumbed to temptation so easily. Ah, you will speak to me of free will which you will say only man possesses. But I tell you that animals possess that free will also. If they did not, that lovely cat of yours would not now have resolved to attack me to the death if I lay a hand upon you, and that is not in the nature of the feline family which is eminently sensible in all its ways. I have respect for animals, respect their noble innocence. But for man," said Lucifer, his voice dropping to a sound of muted thunder, " I have nothing but detestation, and regard him with horror."

The Bishop gaped. " You—you have *horror* for us? You? "

" Certainly," said Lucifer, with a contemptuous smile. " Are you not the horror of all that lives? What animal does not flee from you, and know you? What wild thing comes to you with love and trust? Man is the enemy of everything that lives. And I am his enemy, always. You know I have sworn to destroy him, out of my detestation."

The Bishop, forgetting his fear, forgetting the constant snarling of Mustard, pondered on this.

After a little he said, " It is true that we are terrible and monstrous. Nevertheless, if Our Lord was willing to take upon Himself our human nature and die for us so that we might be saved from death, then we must possess something worthy."

" Your souls," said Lucifer. " Your immortal souls. He—and I—we struggle for them. It has always been my intention to show Him conclusively that you and your world are not worthy of Him, and that you must die."

" You wish to triumph over God," said the Bishop, absorbed in the discussion.

Lucifer shook his head. " No, I wish to show Him His folly."

" That is blasphemy," said the Bishop in a trembling voice.

Lucifer smiled again. " No. Man is the blasphemy."

The Bishop contemplated Lucifer, and he put his hand on Mustard's arched back. A strange thought came to him and he voiced it. " You do not hate God. No, you do not hate Him."

"No," said Lucifer, "I leave that supreme monstrousness to man, who is the only creature who hates his creator." His beautiful face changed, became charged with wrath and grief and awful loneliness. "The time is almost at hand when almost every man will hate Him, and that will be my triumph. I will destroy those who love Him—and this world, of which I am Prince, will be mine alone, in all its evil, all its utter godlessness, all its living blasphemy."

"That is not true," said the Bishop, who had begun to quake again. "You cannot do anything that God does not permit." He remembered his terrible vision in his church, and his throat became dry and stiff with terror.

"But man will permit it, for not even God will interfere with free will," said Lucifer.

The Bishop shook his head, some courage returning to him. "I know the prophecies of Our Lord, and what He has said of the last days. You will not triumph."

The Bishop suddenly thought of the speculations and writings of the ancient Fathers concerning Lucifer, and their conjectures regarding him. Man was the cause of Lucifer's fall, they said. He was the cause of Lucifer's exile and great torment and despair; man, in effect, had created hell. No wonder Lucifer hated man!

Was it possible, thought the Bishop, that man might redeem Lucifer, by turning from him so absolutely and becoming so perfect in his life? What had a great cardinal said? "We must believe in hell, for the Church declares that hell exists, but so great is the mercy of God that I doubt, my children, that there is any soul there." If this were true, then hell was only waiting, empty except for the angels who had followed Lucifer out of heaven, for the last days when Christ would separate the sheep from the goats. A sweating and passionate urgency came to the Bishop. The goats must be few, if any! If there were none at all then Lucifer would be vanquished, would acknowledge his defeat, and in his humility—and perhaps gratitude—turn from his hatred and his destruction.

He would turn to God again, this majestic archangel; his hell would be no more, and there would be rejoicing in heaven. Lucifer, at his worst, had never been base or petty. That had been left to man.

The Bishop remembered the dialogues between God and Lucifer, always conducted with courtesy and understanding. Did God remember His Morning Star, the mightiest and most brilliant of His angels? Surely, for the Holy Bible so stated. Man stood between God and Lucifer, like a burning and muddy wall of death. God forgave, but Lucifer could not.

The white storm outside the Bishop's house roared into vast fury, full of shrieking and howling voices, and the Bishop came to himself with a start. Mustard jumped up on his knees, never taking her golden eyes from Lucifer, and she flattened her ears and her mouth gaped open showing all her savage white fangs. She was on guard.

"Our little business," said Lucifer, in an almost gentle voice.

" Your soul, my lord, for the lives and souls of your young people. I have eternity, but you have only a little time."

" Why should you wish my soul? " said the Bishop. " Sure, and you should be wanting the souls of the pompous men of the earth, the kings and the emperors, and not of a miserable, starving old Bishop."

" Your humility is fascinating," said Lucifer. " What youthful sins you committed have been forgiven you. Since you became a priest you have lived a most holy life, and are blameless. Is not such a soul precious to God and Lucifer? If I gain your soul then He has a great defeat. Our triumphs are not the petty triumphs of man. Well? "

During powerful stress the Bishop had always resorted to a small but priceless object, which never failed to comfort and console him. His eyes turned to the little chest which contained it, and fastened on the very drawer. He felt tears on his lashes. He pondered again. It has been said that Lucifer could read the most inmost thoughts of men.

The Bishop visualised the item in the drawer of the chest and said, " You can read my thoughts, I am thinking? "

" Certainly," said Lucifer.

" Of what am I thinking, then? "

" You are pondering if you should withhold your one soul even if it means the death, and perhaps the hell, of two hundred others."

The Bishop kept his withered lips from smiling. But he could not help wondering . . . Why had Lucifer not read his thoughts—not seen the small item in his mind? The Bishop's heart leapt with courage and resolution. It was a mystery, but he had no time now to wonder over mysteries.

" I cannot give you my soul, nor is it pledging it I am, for any reason," he said with quiet firmness and he looked into Lucifer's marvellous blue eyes with the shadows of endless centuries in them. " But, I will give you my life for the lives of my children in the cold prisons."

" That is a wretched bargain," said Lucifer, with a little laughter. " What is your life to me, and is not your life God's and not yours to dispose of, my lord? Your very offer is a mortal sin, is it not? " Lucifer paused, and he was very thoughtful. " Was it a mortal sin, Bishop? If so, and you do not repent of that offer, then I can take your life in payment and your soul will belong to me."

The Bishop cowered. Lucifer held out his gemmed hand to him, smiling again, and every finger flashed. Mustard darted her head forward with a frightful snarl and her jaws snapped upon the hand. Lucifer contemplated the cat almost affectionately, then tapped the writhing head with the finger of his other hand. At once Mustard howled dreadfully and there was a stench of burning hair and hide in the air, and a wisp of smoke rising from Mustard's flesh. Crying aloud, the Bishop put his palm over the tormented head and the heat stung his skin. He clasped Mustard to his breast, but she

struggled from his arms and stood on his knees, valiantly facing Lucifer and preparing to spring in spite of her agony. Now she was one ginger-coloured menace, and utterly silent.

"A melodramatic gesture," said Lucifer with regret, "and one I do not usually make. I leave that to lesser demons, such as the souls of men. My apologies. Your cat did not need convincing, but you did. Time grows short"—and he lifted his noble head and listened to the ferocity of the white gale along the eaves and windows and doors, and heard its wild battering.

"A cruel thing!" cried the Bishop, with tears on his cheeks. He clutched Mustard's rear legs to prevent her from leaping. "You are wrong; I had no intention to commit a sin, mortal or venial, in offering my old life in exchange for the lives of my young flock. I offered it as saints have offered theirs, to save others from suffering and the gallows. It is not accounted a sin."

"I am no theologian," said Lucifer, "in such minor matters. Well, then, your soul? I am growing impatient."

"Not my soul," said the Bishop resolutely. "My soul belongs to God, and never to you. But I have a treasure which always I have held dearer than my lowly life, and it is that treasure I am offering you for the taking." He held his breath and watched Lucifer intensely, wondering again if he could read his thoughts.

Lucifer studied him in genial silence, and the blue of his eyes appeared to wash over the Bishop's face.

"My life and my joys and my sorrows are entwined with my treasure," faltered the Bishop. "All the years of my life. It is dearer to me than aught else in the world. Will you take it?"

"It is dearer to you than your life?" said Lucifer. "Then it is as dear as your soul?"

The Bishop did not reply. His trembling hands stroked Mustard's back.

"If it is as dear as your soul to your lordship, then the fibres of your spirit are entwined with it."

The Bishop closed his eyes in pain.

"It is said that I never feel compassion for any man," said Lucifer, "but strangely I feel compassion for your lordship. I am much underrated. What is your treasure?"

The Bishop dared to open his eyes, and he was again incredulous. He said with great softness, "But surely you are knowing, for do you not read the thoughts and hearts of men?"

"Um," said Lucifer, thoughtfully. Again the fiery blueness of his eyes swept over the little Bishop's wizened features, and the Bishop could feel its impact like a stroke of lightning on his heart. But he did not quake now. He waited.

"A fine treasure," said Lucifer. "It is, indeed, dearer to you than your miserable life. It is of no value except to you, and so it is of value to me. Let me consider a moment." The eyes did not leave the Bishop's face, and he stared back at this stupendous archangel and hardly let himself breathe.

"Done," said Lucifer suddenly. He examined the hand on

which Mustard's fangs had snapped. There was no trace of a bruise on it, or any mark.

The Bishop felt the sagging of an awful weakness, whether of renewed fear or relief he did not know, but it was compounded of both.

"I will not be giving you my dearest treasure," he said, "until my children are safe." He paused, knowing the deviousness of Lucifer. "Safe," he repeated firmly. "Not safe in death, not safe through a vile trick, which would not be safety at all. Free, alive, safe—in the meaning I have, so that they live out the years God has allotted them in hope and peace."

"I cannot guarantee the hope and peace for every heart and soul," said Lucifer. "It is for their own choosing. But I will set them free of the prison, free of the hangman, free of bondage. For your treasure." He held out his hand again, and the Bishop restrained Mustard.

"I am a man of my word," said the Bishop, "and you know that, I am thinking. Many was the head I knocked and broke in my youth, but never did I lie knowingly. So I promise you my treasure when you have completed the bargain. You have only to return and I will place it in your hand."

"You are asking me to trust you," said Lucifer, "I who trust no man. I believe you will give me your dearest treasure, so it is a bargain." He stood up, and so tall was he that he towered almost to the ceiling and the room quivered as if with flashes of white flame. Mustard howled, but her rigid body still strained at the archangel in her desire to attack.

"Hush, my darlin'," said the Bishop, stroking the poor bruised head gently. Mustard started, and the Bishop looked up. He and Mustard were alone, and the peat fire was very low and the lamp was guttering and the white storm shook the little house as a dog shakes a rat.

The door was flung open and there was old Eileen on the threshold of the room, with a patched woollen garment over her long nightgown. She blinked at her brother wrathfully. "And what is it you are doing, Bernard, at this hour of the morning and Mass but two hours away, at your age and with no food in your stomach for two days?"

"I—I was thinking," said the Bishop.

"Hah!" exclaimed Eileen, putting her veined hands on her hips. She scowled about the room. "And who was it you was thinking with, for did I not hear voices?"

"You heard voices?" said the Bishop.

"Your ould squeaky one, and another! It was not talking to Mustard you were!"

"What did the voice sound like?" said the Bishop.

Eileen glared at him suspiciously. "The voice of a man, ye ould fool! Or was it," asked Eileen with sarcasm, "the voice of an angel, he visiting you?"

" Yes," said the Bishop.

Eileen snorted. She loved her brother with all her heart, but he was younger than she and she considered him only a lad who needed watching and bullying. " Glory be to the saints! " she cried. " And it's bragging ye are, in your dotage and your sins, and making mock of your poor sister! Off to bed with you, for a little sleep." She sniffed suddenly. " And what is that stench, your highness? Your pipe? "

The Bishop tried to rise, but all at once he felt quite sick and undone. Then Eileen was fascinated by Mustard. " Look at the ginger divil! " she said, marvelling. " On your knee, she who would niver go near you."

" A—a piece of fire fell on her head," said the Bishop faintly. " I comforted her."

Eileen bore down on Mustard, and examined the burnt spot incredulously. " Well then," she said after a moment, " it's no great harm." She seized Mustard roughly and prepared to toss her on to the chair which Lucifer had occupied, but Mustard howled terribly, writhed in Eileen's arms, and sprang to the floor. " Her own chair! " said Eileen. " And why will she not take it? "

Mustard scuttled under the Bishop's chair, her body vibrating.

" Has the Divil been after her? " said Eileen with disbelief.

" That he has," said the Bishop with his last strength. And he fainted in his seat. His final memory before he became unconscious was of the mighty roaring of the storm and the whimpering of Mustard under his legs.

When he opened his eyes again it was to a glare of sunlight flashing from deep snow, and the doctor was at his bed, and he felt sick to death. He could only think of one of his priests and he whispered, " Jack. Fetch me Jack. I am dying."

" Not a bit of it," said the doctor. " A fever, and hunger, but there's a fine fowl boiling in the kitchen which I brought with my own two hands. You'll be better for the soup and a wing."

" No," said the Bishop, and blinked the fog out of his eyes. When he could see again he felt a warm comfort in his stomach and warmth at his feet, and a candle burnt beside his bed and the moon looked in the window. Eileen, wrapped in a thick shawl, was dozing in a chair near her brother. She came awake at once, almost as soon as he had awakened.

He had had, she said with satisfaction, a good supper of chicken soup and potatoes, and had devoured it like a wolf, and it was now midnight and he must sleep. She put her wizened hand on his forehead and nodded with more satisfaction. The Bishop was dazed. He moistened his lips and tried to speak and moved his head to clear his wits—and sunlight struck on his eyes. It was another day. But Eileen said it was two days and the doctor was pleased that the fever had gone. The Bishop tried to sit up; weakness overpowered him like a wave and he fell back on his pillows and slept again.

When he awoke on another day, free of the fever and cool and with his wits about him, Mustard was sitting on the bed, on the Bishop's feet over the worn blankets. Her golden eyes gazed at him wisely. The top of her head had been lavishly anointed with Eileen's pet and odoriferous salve and the smell filled the little cold bedroom, which was full of quiet winter light.

" Mustard," said the Bishop, and remembered everything.

His heart quickened with dread as his whirling mind assured him he had been only the victim of a feverish dream and sick hallucinations. A Lucifer did not come to a very old and starveling Bishop in his little house in Dublin. A Lucifer, the mightiest of all angels, did not waste time in seeking tiny souls; such souls are wooed by tiny demons. A Lucifer could read the minds of all men, and yet, in that dream, he had not been able to read the Bishop's mind, not even in the simplest matter. Lucifers are not deceived.

" It is my wretched pride," said the old Bishop, " in my thinking that Lucifer would find me worth the tempting! Oh, it's the proud and wicked heart I have, the black, black heart, and me a Bishop! " He looked at his ring; it was so loose now that Eileen had wrapped the back of it with white yarn so it would not fall from his finger.

Then he began to weep, remembering the young folk in the prisons awaiting death for the crime of defending themselves and wanting the food of their labours for their children and parents, and for the greater crime of a dream of freedom and liberty to worship as they must. The Bishop turned his face into his fat pillow and the coarse linen was soon wet with his tears. Mustard moved uneasily on his feet, then she slipped down, and nuzzled his neck gently. He turned his head and stroked the thick gingery fur and saw again the big healing burn on her valiant head. " Was it a dream, Mustard? " he asked her urgently. Mustard whined a little, consolingly.

The door was flung open and there was Jack Morgan, the middle-aged priest, tall and big and with a ruddy, lighted face, and the fiercest blue eyes in Ireland.

" Jack, Jack," said the Bishop feebly, " I have been wanting you—"

The priest, exhaling ice-cold air and briskness and elation, knelt to kiss the Bishop's ring, and his eyes were dancing with exultation. " It is I who have been here every blessed day! " he shouted in his ringing voice, " praying beside your bed and listening—your lordship will forgive me—to your feverish babblings about Lucifer! " The priest laughed richly.

Before the Bishop could utter even a murmur, Jack Morgan roared on, " Oh, it's the grand news I have for you, my lord, this morning! The grand news! "

The Bishop began to tremble, and he started up on his pillows.

The priest chuckled heartily, and shook his head with delight. " Ye'll not be believing it, my lord, but the lads and girls are free and safe! That English Judge—he was thrown in the deep snow from his carriage three days ago, and broke his da—I mean his

two legs! And it was Judge Rafferty who presided for the hearing, a Protestant but an Irishman, and may God love him! "

" Tell me! " cried the Bishop, when his priest stopped to rub his big knees and shake his head.

Jack Morgan's eyes glittered with joy and happiness. " It was Judge Rafferty who said the young folk had but defended themselves, and it was sympathy he had for them in spite of the stout blackthorns and their rioting against the peace and order of the Realm and Her Majesty's Government! It was regretting, he was, that the other Judge had lost his nephew, but who could swear which lad had cracked his skull? It was the fortunes of war, said Judge Rafferty, and the accidents of war, and his was the straight face, and he said skull-cracking was an old sport in the world and there'd be no end to it. He'd cracked many a skull himself at rugby, and was it a crime in a war but not in a game? Ah, it was the smooth voice he had, smooth as cream and cold as new cheese on a winter's day, and the Crown Prosecutor protested and down came the gavel and the Judge's wig fell over his eyes, and all laughed in the room. The Judge," said Jack Morgan, with rising joy, " fined each lad one pound each and each colleen eight shillings, and gave them a warning."

" Oh," whispered the Bishop, and clasped his hands, and was afraid to thank God.

" And there was a fine gentleman," continued the priest, " who paid the fine for them all, for where should the lads be getting pounds and the girls the shillings, they who have not even copper pennies amongst them? "

" A fine gentleman? " quaked the Bishop, his heart jumping again.

" That he was, and no name he gave. He spoke of a patron. A gentleman like a duke."

" Oh! " exclaimed the Bishop. " Was it a man with the face of an angel? "

Jack Morgan stared at him, puzzled. " No, your Excellency. A man with a big yellow moustache." He laughed again. " Are the angels growing moustaches now? "

" It is happy I am," said the Bishop, " that my children are free. But my heart is heavy that I made a pact with the Devil for them, and had no trust in God."

Jack Morgan gaped. He was a man of good and earthy common sense, and he thought his Bishop was feverish again. So the Bishop put his hand on Mustard and pointed to her burnt head. With painful word following painful word he told his favourite priest of that howling winter night. Finally he ended with a hoarse whisper, " Is there forgiveness for me, I am wondering, Jack? "

The priest rubbed his thick grey head, and stared at the Bishop, and coughed. He appeared bewitched by the tale, though he doubted its verity. He wanted to know of Lucifer's appearance, and the Bishop described him. The priest was enchanted, and the

Bishop thought, with dismay, Is Jack a little envious, as well as curious?

"Well, well," said Jack Morgan, in a loud and burly voice, "it was not the Devil, I am thinking, for does he not have horns and hoofs and does he not wear red, as red as scarlet?"

"I am no authority on his apparitions," said the Bishop. "And it's doubting, I am, that if he appeared so to man there'd be many lost souls, for very fear. I think I saw him, and it is all true, and he was the most beautiful creature I have seen in my life. For is he not an archangel, and was he not the greatest of them all, with a face like the morning? And was he not full of grief and sorrow? I found it in my heart to pity him."

"That is a snare," said Jack Morgan, suddenly remembering that he was a priest.

"Sure, and that is true, perhaps," said the Bishop.

"It was not himself," said the priest. "If it was not a dream, it was an angel of God." And he blessed himself.

The Bishop smiled wryly. "Would an angel of God burn poor Mustard's head? Would poor Mustard, from thence on, refuse to sit in her favourite chair? No, it was Lucifer, and I made a pact with him for my children."

"Your soul?" exclaimed Jack Morgan.

"No. My dearest treasure. And he'll be calling for it soon."

The priest glanced nervously over his shoulder. Then he coughed again. "The Devil takes only souls, my lord," he said. "He is not tempted by—treasures. It is not possible that he would make a pact with you for anything but your soul."

"He does not know what my treasure is, Jack."

The priest was greatly relieved, and his high colour returned. "Was it the Devil, my lord, he'd have known, for does he not read the minds of men like a book?"

"He could not read mine," said the Bishop. "I tested him, and he could not read it."

The priest was even more relieved. "Then it was not Satan, or even one of his demons—if there was anyone at all, and you with the fever and the hunger. For no human mind is closed to him."

The Bishop wanted to believe it was all a dream. Perhaps a coal had fallen on Mustard's head, when she went too close to the fire. And it was God's mercy, alone, which had saved the young folk and set them free, and the mercy of an unknown benefactor who had paid their fines. Nothing could happen, thought the Bishop vaguely, without God's permitting of it. On this comforting thought he fell into deep sleep, for he was still weak.

When he awoke again it was midnight, and he felt his ancient strength returning. He begged Eileen to go to her bed, she who looked not ninety now, but one hundred and ninety. It needed little urging; she put a clapper on the table at his head, and went, bowed and very old and lean, to her own room and bed.

It was cold in the Bishop's bedroom, though the door was open

to his small parlour so the heat of the fire could enter. Someone had been kind enough to send coals to heat the Bishop's house. The bed-warmer was cosy against the Bishop's feet, against the long wool stockings he wore to bed in the winter, and the candlelight flickered and there was a lamp burning on a table in the parlour. within sight of the Bishop's eyes.

He pulled himself to a sitting position with only one gasp, and he turned his head and looked at the crucifix on his wall, and then at his prie-dieu, and then he pushed his thin old legs out of the bed, tottered to the prie-dieu and fell on his knees and bent his head over his clasped hands. Could he ask forgiveness for a dream, for are men responsible for the nightmares of their nights and the phantoms of their fevers? If it was not a dream, could he still be forgiven? He had made no pact, in the meaning of the word. He had offered his dear treasure, and Lucifer had accepted it, and this was puzzling for he must have known what it was and how could he then have agreed?

Mustard suddenly yelled and dived between the floor and the Bishop's ankles and cowered there, and the Bishop knew, even before he lifted his bowed head, whom he would see. And there, surely, was Lucifer himself, more beautiful than memory, his clothing covered with a cloak of rich velvet edged with ermine, the velvet as black as night and the fur whiter than snow.

"I have come for your lordship's treasure," he said, in a very kind voice. "For I have kept my bargain, as you know."

"Are you a dream?" asked the Bishop with fresh terror.

"I am every man's dream," said Lucifer.

"And you cannot be deceived?" said the Bishop.

"No, I cannot be deceived," said Lucifer. "May I assist your lordship to your feet?"

"No, no!" cried the Bishop, horrified, and shrinking. He pushed himself to his feet. He stared at the great, dark angel. "You will not want my treasure," he said, pressing his hands to his chest, in which his heart was shaking.

"Surely I will want it," said Lucifer, "for is it not dearer to you than your life?"

"And you are knowing what it is?" said the Bishop.

"Certainly. I know all things."

He looked smilingly at the Bishop, then courteously drew aside so that the Bishop could precede him into the parlour. The Bishop tottered to the threshold, then glanced back fearfully. Lucifer was regarding the crucifix in enigmatic silence, and there was a deep cleft between his eyes. The Bishop went into the parlour, his long nightshirt blowing about him in the draughts which no mortar could stop, and he supported himself with bits of furniture. He heard no sound, but all at once Lucifer was at his side.

"The treasure," he said patiently.

The Bishop bent his head and went to his little chest of drawers and opened the one at the top. A silver-gilt box lay there, very old and dim.

He took the box in his hands and his eyes filled with tears. He lifted the lid.

A delicate rosary lay on pink cottonwool. It was made of silver-gilt, with pearly beads, and the cross was large and the Corpus was exquisitely cast in pure yellow gold. The rosary had been the christening gift to his grandmother by her own mother, ages ago, and in turn it had been given to his own mother at her christening and it was rarely out of her blessed hands until the day she died.

She had told her son, long before he was a priest, that she must not be buried with it. It was her heart's desire that he have it as his own, and be buried with it, for he was very dear to her. He had received it from her finally, when she was dying. He had cherished the rosary because of his darling mother. He had received his First Communion with it in his hand. It never left his person, even during the skull-cracking days. It was with him when he was ordained as a lowly priest. He felt that it was a talisman, the guardian given him by his mother.

Once he had lost it from his pocket, and his distress had been overwhelming. He had prayed feverishly to St. Anthony for its return, and one day the sacristan had brought it to him, saying he had found it in a crack near the high altar. Yet every corner had been searched over and over long before. The Bishop considered it a miracle.

Now his tears fell on the precious rosary, and he put his fingers gently over the lustrous pearly beads and the cross, and turned to Lucifer.

He closed his eyes and mutely offered the box to him.

The box did not leave his hands, and after a little while he opened his eyes.

Lucifer was gazing at the crucifix, and he was frowning.

"You know I cannot take this," he said in a very ominous voice.

"It is my dearest treasure. It belonged to my grandmother and her mother before her; it was blessed, so long ago, by the Holy Father Himself, so I was told. It belonged to my sweet mother, who gave it to me with her dying hands. My heart is in it; it is the dearest thing I ever owned." The Bishop's voice trembled. "Not even for bread would I have sold it. Not even for my life would I have sold it. It is my treasure, for thousands of prayers were said with it and every bead is holy."

Lucifer looked into his eyes, which were filled with tears.

"Yes," said Lucifer, "it is your treasure. And it is this treasure that you pledged to me. Tell me, my lord, did you know, when you promised it, that I could not accept it, for very excellent reasons?"

The Bishop thought with all the honesty that was in him. Then he confessed, "I do not know. I was in much misery: my mind was not fully in order. But, I must speak truly: I hoped you could not accept it."

"You hoped to deceive me?"

The Bishop again considered. " I prayed that I could. Yes, that I prayed, though I had heard you could not be deceived and could read the minds of all men."

Lucifer was silent.

The Bishop said, " Did you read mine? "

The great dark archangel began to smile. " Shall I tell you that? That will be my secret. As a penance, you will wonder all your life. It will enliven your idle moments. There is nothing like endless speculation to give interest to one's existence."

The Bishop gently closed the precious box. He looked down at it. " I am speculating now, Lucifer."

Suddenly Lucifer laughed. It was not an evil, boisterous laugh, but a hearty one, mirthful, delighted, masculine. It was incredible, but the Bishop found himself laughing with him, and he had not laughed for many months.

" Tell me," said the Bishop, aching with his laughter, " did you truly save my children? "

" That," said Lucifer, his beautiful face merry, " is something else I will not tell you. Am I not called the Great Deceiver? "

His mighty blue eyes sparkled and flamed with his mirth, and his teeth glistened in the lamplight.

" Farewell, Bishop Quinn. You will not see me again, not in this life nor in the next. I have enjoyed your conversation as I have enjoyed the conversation of few others. You are not entirely honest, but I doubt if that will be held against you, for I now hear the laughter in heaven."

He threw back his head and laughed again, that hearty and rollicking laughter. But suddenly he was sober. He looked at the Bishop.

" You will remember a vision you had, which you saw in your church when you were fainting of hunger. Tell no one of it! "

" Why shall I not? " said the Bishop.

" Because it is my truth, though it was prophesied by another. You shall not see it, nor the young priests following you. But those not yet born will see it, and it will be my triumph, my final triumph. Many there will be who will try to escape it, but they shall not! For man is a curse upon the earth, which would be free of him, but would He listen to me, He Who knows all? No, He would not. Yet He and I know that it will come to pass on this earth, and we shall see," said Lucifer vengefully, " who will triumph then! For in the womb of time there is breeding a race of men who shall be my total servants.

" Hail and farewell, Bishop Quinn, and rejoice that you shall not see that day! "

Did the blessed Bishop, by his deceit which was caused half by fever and starvation and grief, lift Lucifer one step towards the heaven he had lost? He liked to think so, to the end of his life. But then, it may all have been a dream. Who is there to tell?

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# NOON GUN by Theodore Sturgeon

## He'd got twenty-one tons at his fingertips

JOE looked down at Mousie, walking so sedately beside him, and he thought, You're a second-rater, and so am I. Her name wasn't Mousie, but Sara Nell. He always called her Sara Nell except when he thought about her, and then she was Mousie. It was her hair, maybe, or the nose that was so very well shaped only one and a half sizes too large for her face. She had a little pointed face. Anyway, it was Mousie, and it wasn't affectionate.

"What's the matter, Joe?" Her voice was lovely, though. And her eyes. She always seemed to be interested in what she was saying, and her eyes widened all the time she talked. In between times they never seemed to narrow, but got longer.

"Nothin'. Thinking."

Thinking about the kind of girls you saw so often in taxis, so seldom on the bus. So often on TV or in the movies, never in a store or bowling or any place around. On TV and the movies you can watch big good-looking guys soften 'em up, push 'em over. The big good-looking guys talk fast and they always have the right answer, and they just mow them down. You never saw a movie about a guy didn't have enough chin, never had the right words at the right time and had none at all when he was mad, or afraid, or when he really meant what he was saying. What kind of a chick would look the second time at a guy like that? If that's what you are, you wind up walking along the street with Mousie because you can't do better.

She was watching him, not looking where she was going, holding his arm very tight and close the way she always did. He liked that, but he never could figure it with the way she turned away when he tried to kiss her. He said, "I was thinking about the picture we saw, the second one."

"Oh. Didn't you like it?"

"Sure I did. Sure. It was swell. It didn't seem too phony either. I mean, the way he wiped out those two machine-gun nests, it could happen that way, I guess. And when he helped

move all those wounded, and then dropped, and you realised he had a bullet in him all that time, that really sat me up. Only—"

"Only what, Joe?"

"Oh—nothing. Nothing much, just that I don't see him making all those wisecracks to that Army nurse when he was hurt. Did you ever know anybody like that, Sara Nell? Are there guys like that, that don't ever get scared, and grin when they fight, and like say something funny when they get hurt?"

"I imagine so. I've seen—well, anyway, they wouldn't pay any attention to *me*."

Oh, Joe thought. But I do. I do, but one of those guys wouldn't. You take the next best thing. He took his arm from her suddenly, so quickly that she opened up her long eyes and stared at him. They walked on, a little apart.

"I'm sorry, Joe."

"For what?"

"I don't know," she said very softly. "I just suddenly felt sorry."

Mousie! he thought furiously. You make me mad. You watch me all the time. You never say what you see. Why did I have to meet up with you? What good are you doing me? You're just as bad as I am. Why don't you tell me to go jump in the drink? . . . But heck, she didn't mean anything. She was just trying to be— "Let's go in here and have a drink before we go home."

She looked up into the neon glare above the entrance. "They ask how old you are."

"Not here they don't."

"All right, Joe." All right, Joe. All the time, all right, Joe.

They went into the place. It split the difference between a twist 'n' fizz joint and a real bar. It was mobbed. There were tables and booths and imitation morocco and all kinds of noise.

"There's some seats," said Sara Nell as Joe hesitated.

"But there's a girl—"

"Nonsense," said Sara Nell. "One girl in a booth that is s'posed to be for four. Come on."

Joe thought he ought to be the one to find the seats, but why make anything of it? They slid side by side into the booth. Joe slung his hat up and out and for once it landed on a hook. Sara Nell laughed and patted his shoulder and the girl opposite smiled.

"Order me what you're having," Sara Nell said. She burrowed into her black handbag and came up with a compact. "I'll be right back."

When she was gone Joe fixed his mind and the base of his

**Remember a hair-raising story called Bianca's Hands? In 1947 it brought Argosy and Theodore Sturgeon together when he won our £500 prize with it, and since then it has been reprinted twice at the special request of readers who wanted to experience its ecstatically nightmarish quality all over again. Now Sturgeon has come up with Noon Gun, entirely different but equally devastating in its unexpectedness. Incidentally, it sounds a wistful echo of the wartime days when Sturgeon drove a bull-dozer : such a fulfilling occupation that he still seizes every opportunity to jump back into the saddle and shift some land-scape. His great ambition, he says, is actually to *own* a bull-dozer. He lives rurally with his wife and four children in the backwoods of upstate New York.**

tongue on a vodka and let his eyes wander over the hot room. The girl opposite was watching him; he sensed it rather than saw it. It made him acutely uncomfortable. He tried hard not to look at her and very nearly succeeded. She was blonde and bigger than Mousie; that he could see out of the corner of his eye . . . But if he was with Mousie he didn't feel that he should— But heck, he could look at her, couldn't he? She wouldn't think he was crawling up her leg if she'd seen him come in with another girl. He obeyed his usual reflex when he felt confused, and took out his cigarettes.

" Please—"

The voice was husky, throaty. He looked across the table, right straight at her.

She was incredible. Her hair was long and thick, golden with firelights. He thought her eyes were green. Her face was round, the skin very white and flawless, and the lobes of her ears were altogether pink. She was dangling an unlit cigarette in her fingers, and was looking at his battered lighter.

" Oh, excuse me," Joe said, and dropped his own lit cigarette into his lap. He flapped and plucked and got it, and corralled it in the ashtray, fumbled up his lighter, and spun the wheel. It caught with its usual bonfire effect.

The girl yelped, recoiled, then laughed and leaned forward. She watched him instead of the flame as she lit up. He saw that her eyes weren't green at all. They were blue, with a little crooked golden ring round each pupil. In the light of the booth's little table lamp, the movement of her mouth on the cigarette showed up a fine line of down on her upper lip. He had an impulse to touch it.

He snapped the lighter shut and displayed it. " Swedish," he announced. " I got it off a guy on a ship. You can't get

'em here. It's sort of beat up now. It dropped out of my pocket one day and I ran a bulldozer over it."

"A bulldozer? You run a bulldozer?"

He nodded eagerly. "You ever watch one work?"

"Oh yes," she said. "I rode on one once, for a couple of minutes. They're the biggest, strongest—"

"I know." He nodded. He knew, too. He thought she had run out of words. Couldn't find words for the blatting of those mighty engines, the unspeakable power of twenty-one tons of steel and racket and brute force, the whole thing obedient as cadets on parade. He looked across at her, at the miracle that had happened to her face to make it interested in his work, and in him. In *him*—and she with that calendar face, that TV-Hollywood face.

"My girlfr— the girl I'm with, she never saw a bulldozer," he said.

"Well, I have. Is it hard to run one of those things?"

So Joe talked about it. He had never been able to talk to a girl like this before. There was a time in high school, a girl called Peggy, and he suddenly found himself talking about her, because this blonde miracle understood about him and the bulldozer.

"You remind me of a girl called Peggy, when I was a kid," he told her. "Once I had a class with her, she sat right next to me; well, I never could bring myself to say a word to her. You know how it is with kids. Well, she passed and I flunked and after that I never saw her but on Wednesdays. On Wednesdays I saw her in assembly. I used to live from one Wednesday to the next, just waiting for her. Just to watch. I never did speak a word to her. Well, that went on for three years until the senior prom and she came with a friend of mine. And me stag. And he came over and said, 'Hi, Joe, you know Peggy.' I just nodded my head yes and she smiled at me. Know what I did? I left the dance," he said in recalled wonderment. "I left and went straight on home." He looked up from his kneading fingers to see the blonde girl's eyes fixed on his face. He blushed. "I guess I was a dope. As a kid."

"I think that was cute," said the blonde warmly. "Did you say your name was Joe? Mine's Bette."

"Oh," said Joe. "Pleased t'meecha. Mine's Joe, all right, Betty."

"Bette, with an e, not with a y. Betty with a y is such a common name, don't you think?"

Joe, by now too far away from bulldozing and feeling lost, didn't know what he thought, and didn't have to, for he suddenly

became conscious of two square hands with stubby fingers and an oversized signet ring on the table beside him. He looked up and saw that they terminated thick arms which in turn supported a pair of wide shoulders wearing an overpadded sports jacket. From a pink-cheeked baby face, a mean little pair of eyes leered viciously at him. One side of the mouth opened and said harshly, " Hiya, Bette. Who's the friend? "

" Oh, Gordon! Gordon, meet Joe. Joe's just waiting for his girl. She's powdering her nose." There was an urgency in her deep sweet voice and, looking up at the man's little eyes, Joe felt a miserable cold lump form in his stomach.

" Yeh? " Gordon slid in next to Bette and said heavily, " Let's jest sit here and help him wait for her."

" He doesn't believe it! " said Bette, and laughed with her mouth. " Gordon, where you been? I been waiting for you thirty minutes."

" Hadda stop an' paste a guy said he was going to make time with you, hon," said Gordon, winking at Joe. Joe smiled weakly. There was something wrong about all this, and he wished suddenly that Sara Nell would hurry up.

" He's a bulldozer operator," said Bette, nodding at Joe, who nodded back, like a marionette. And for just a fraction of a second the arrogance slipped off Gordon's face, leaving it bland, years younger. Then he caught it again. " *He* is? Well—long as he din't bring his bulldozer."

Joe said, " Ha-ha," and was appalled at how hollow it sounded.

Sara Nell had slid in beside him before he fully realised she was back. She was saying something about she hoped she hadn't been too long. You have been, Joe thought. He said, " Sara Nell, this's, uh, Bette and Gordon." Sara Nell bobbed her head as each name was mentioned.

Bette said " Hullo! " and smiled.

Gordon glanced briefly at Sara Nell's face, intently at the front of her dress, shrugged his shoulders and turned in his seat to face Bette more directly. He said not a word.

Joe sat silent and miserable. A waitress scuffed up. " Vodka twice," Joe said.

Sara Nell shook her head. " I don't want anything now."

" Coke," said Bette. Surprise slanted into Joe's mind. She should have said " Champagne cocktail," or something. Didn't they always?

" I'll have a drink with you," Gordon said pointedly to Bette, " when you and him are finished." The waitress shuffled off.

" Aw, Gordon, don't be like that. Joe didn't mean anything, did you, Joe? Does he look like a wolf or something? "

Gordon flicked a glance, not at Joe, but at Sara Nell. He said, "Hell, no."

"Well, he isn't," said Bette complacently. "I know. He was telling me just before you came—"

Oh no, Joe thought, holy smoke, don't tell him *that*! I didn't tell you about Peggy so you would—

But she was. In her own way, which wasn't like what he had told her. She made it different. She made it as if he was still the same kind of a cube he was when he was a kid. She made it sound as if it had happened just yesterday, instead of three whole years ago, nearly four. He opened his mouth to say something, and nothing would come. He felt Sara Nell's hand on his arm and realised he was half out of his seat, hanging there clumsily. He dropped back and closed his eyes and let the silly little anecdote come pouring over him like hot oil from a busted hydraulic line.

When Bette was quite finished, finished also with an expansion of how *very* cute she thought it all was, Gordon swore.

It made Joe jump. Bette apparently noticed nothing. Joe didn't have to look at Sara Nell.

Joe said, "Aw, Bette, you shouldn't've told about that."

"Why not?" Gordon grated. "She can say what she wants. It's a free country, ain't it?"

"Sure, but—"

"But nothin', who do you think you are, Nicky Khrushchev or something?"

"Gordon," said Bette, "will you leave the kid alone?"

"Aw, it's all right," said Joe.

Sara Nell said suddenly, "Joe, will you take me home? I have an awful headache."

Joe looked at her in amazement. He had never heard her voice become shrill before. "You got a headache?"

"Sure she has," said Gordon. "Name's Joe." He brought his thick hand down on the table and guffawed.

"Very f—" Joe began, but something choked him. He had to swallow before he could say, "Very funny." To Sara Nell he said desperately, "I ordered a *drink*."

"Please, Joe . . ." she said. The face she had now, this was new to him, too. "Please. Now. I feel sick."

Joe opened his mouth, but before he could say anything Sara Nell was up and walking away. He rose, tried a smile and a shrug that somehow didn't quite come off, reached for his hat and started off after her.

"Hey. *You!*"

He stopped.

Gordon said, " Who's supposed to pay for the drinks, deadbeat? Me? "

Infuriatingly, Sara Nell came back to him, accompanied him to the table. He said to her, " If it wasn't for you—" He got his wallet out. Gordon was sitting back making his little eyes even smaller. Joe took out a bill and tossed it to him. " Here. When she comes. With the drinks. We got to go."

Bette said good-bye but Joe couldn't answer. He took Sara Nell's arm and hurried her out.

" Joe! Your change! "

" Skip it. I got plenty of money."

Outside it was red and dark, red and dark with the neon, and the cool air took the hot fuzziness that filled him and compressed it into a fiery ball. " *You!* " he gritted. " What'd you want to rush me out like that for? You want that guy to think I was afraid of him? "

Sara Nell made a strange little sound and snatched her arm away from him. They stopped walking. Joe said, " One more crack outa him and I'd'a had to paste him one."

" Joe! " she cried as if she had been stabbed, " don't talk out of the side of your mouth! "

" What's the matter with you? "

She placed her hands carefully together and looked down at them. Her bag swung from her left wrist, and from its wide gilded clasp, the neon letter B, reversed, appeared and disappeared. B for Bar. B for Backwards. B for Bette. She spoke to him carefully, and at last in her own full voice again. " Joe . . . I don't want you to be mad at me. I have no claim on you, and you can do what you want. But—"

" What are you talking about? "

" Please don't throw your money away. You work too hard for it."

" For God's sake, I told you. I got plenty."

" All right, Joe. But . . . ten dollars is a lot for a drink you didn't even have."

" Ten—did I put ten dollars on that table? "

" That's what you took out of your wallet."

Joe whipped out his wallet and fanned through it. " Holy smoke." He looked up at the pulsing glare, and back at his wallet.

Sara Nell said, probably to herself, " Those awful people . . ."

" Aw, they're O.K.," Joe said. He put away his wallet. " He just talks too much for his own good, that's all . . . Well," he demanded suddenly, " we just going to stand here? "

She just stood there.

" Come on," he growled.

"All right, Joe," she said. They walked away from the bar. After a while she said, "Let's walk all the way."

"I got enough mon—"

"I want to," she said.

They walked in too much silence after it had been normally dark for a time, and he lashed out, "All right, so you didn't like them! So they're not your type, that's all. So forget them!"

"All right, Joe."

All the time, all right, Joe. And watching him. She had always been watching him, ever since he met her. She watched him eat. She watched him walk. Did she . . . did she *think* while she watched? She never said. He had such an abrupt vision of the crooked golden ring on blue pupils that he blinked; the vision jogged along with him, fading no faster than the after-image of a flash bulb. No matter what, this Mousie would never do that to him, or anything like it.

He found, after a while, that she had his arm again. He had not been aware of her taking it. She said, "Joe. Did I ever tell you about my brother Jackie and the noon gun?"

"What about it?"

"We used to live near the fort. Every time they shot that cannon at noon Jackie would start to cry, even when he was a baby. Everybody knew about it. Everybody used to laugh at him, to kid him out of it. They used to look at their watches and hang around him waiting. And sure enough when the gun went off he'd jump and start to cry.

"Well, one summer when he was about thirteen, my Uncle John and Aunt Helen were visiting, and Jackie cried like that, and Uncle John gave me two dollars but he said to Jackie he was ashamed they had the same name. I—I guess he was only trying to help. But anyway, at night Jackie told me he would never cry at the noon gun again. The way he said it, Joe, he scared me. I was so worried, the way he acted, I kept my eye on him all the next morning.

"Well, about half past eleven he sort of slid out of the yard without saying anything and I waited a second and went after him. He took the hill road and went right up to the fort, and jumped over the road wall at the top and went on round the side of the building and sat down on the grass with his back to the wall. And there right over his head was that cannon." She was quiet for so long that he nudged her.

"What'd he do?"

"Nothing. He just sat there looking out at the sea. At five minutes to twelve he could hear the voices of the gun crew. I could, too, where I was hiding. Then he sort of squinched up

his face and dug his fingers into the dirt. And he started to cry. He didn't try to wipe his face. He kept his hands in the dirt. It must have been to keep him from putting his fingers in his ears. Finally the gun went off—*blam!*—and he jumped like a jack-in-the-box. Afterwards, he sat there for a minute until he stopped crying, and he wiped his face with his handkerchief and wiped his hands on his pants."

"What'd you say to him?"

"Oh—nothing. I ran home. He never did know I saw him."

"Now why did he want to do a thing like that?"

Sara Nell looked up at him. "He was a funny kid. You know, he never did cry at that noon gun any more. For a couple of weeks he'd sort of tighten up when it went off, but after a while he stopped doing that even. And then he'd just grin."

They reached her gate. Joe said, "That's the craziest story I ever heard."

She reached behind her, opened the gate, slid through and closed it between them. "Well . . . good night, Joe. Thanks for the show and all." She turned and went up the steps. At the top she looked back and saw him still standing there. She said good night again and when he didn't answer she went into the house.

At the click of the door Joe started, took a step towards the gate. There was something so very final about the click; it left him alone, and it told him what he hadn't known until then—that he didn't want to be alone. He stared at the lighted windows for a moment, and finally shrugged. "That dame," he said out of the corner of his mouth. He turned and started downtown.

"I guess I shoulda pasted that guy one," he muttered. He put his hands in his pockets and hunched his shoulders. In the back of his mind, a most intimate possession of his, a sort of private movie projector, began reeling off a new feature, in Technicolor. He saw himself in the bar, striding up to the table, a thin smile on his merciless lips. Gordon looked up and turned pale. "Well, wise guy?" said Joe out of the corner of his mouth.

Gordon said, "Now, looka, a joke's a joke, huh?"

Joe slowly extended his hand. Gordon said, "O.K., O.K.," and put the change from Joe's ten dollars into it.

Joe put the money in his pocket and stood there rocking on the balls of his feet, staring Gordon down. "Punk!" he spat.

Bette rose and ran to him and threw her arms around him. "Don't hit him, Joe!" Joe gently disengaged her and shoved her carelessly aside.

Fade-out.

Joe took his hands out of his pockets and walked a little faster.

Another reel. Joe and Gordon standing toe to toe, slugging it out. Bette shouting, "Come on, Joey!" A right, a left, another right, and Gordon was down, blood streaming from his nose and mouth. "Oh, Joe, my Joe . . ." and as he turned to face her and the hot promise of her parted lips, he saw too late that the coward on the floor had a gun. *Blam!* But with the explosion, Bette's tear-filled face was blanked out by the superimposed picture of a kid sitting in a swirl of smoke under the muzzle of a cannon, digging his hands into the dirt and crying.

Joe shook his head in annoyance. He tried to get a close-up of Bette, whose dress was torn somehow, saying, "You've killed him, you rat! You've killed my Joe!"—flinging herself down beside him as he gasped his life out; but it couldn't jell.

Gordon, he thought bitterly. Gordon is the guy who grins when he fights. A tough guy. Smack him one in the nose. He grins. When the noon gun goes off, he grins. Pump him full of lead, and he wisecracks with the Army nurse. The blonde Army nurse.

I'll get him out on the fill where I'm working, Joe thought. I'll be up on my dozer, and I'll run him down. I'll slap her in sixth gear. Just a touch on the steering clutches. He can't dodge *me*. I got twenty-one tons at my fingertips. Blade him under. Lock a track and spin him into the dirt and spread him out and back-blade him into nothing but a stain in the mud. In Technicolor again, he pictured himself up on the machine, approaching the bar. He dropped his blade and swung into the front of the building. *Blam!* But instead of people running and screaming, instead of chrome-pipe chairs bouncing and scattering off the blade, instead of a sweaty Gordon crying, "He brought his bulldozer!" there was just the kid under the gun again, crying without trying to wipe his face.

"I got to do it," Joe said suddenly in a strained voice. He thought, What right have I to horn in on them? and replied instantly, I can just ask for my change.

Ahead of him the lurid neon over the bar made the street and house fronts alternately blood and black, blood and black. He crossed over towards it and stumbled on the kerbstone. His heart was pounding so hard that he had to catch his breath in between beats. He went in.

There were not many people left. He thought suddenly, Maybe they've gone. He craned his neck towards the booths and instantly saw Bette's beacon of hair.

He wiped his palms on the sides of his trousers. The waitress was behind the bar. Maybe she'd have the change. Maybe

he wouldn't have to ask Gordon at all. He went over to her. She looked tireder than she had before.

"I gave you ten dollars for two vodkas and a Coke a while back," he said. "I was sitting over there. Have you got the change?"

"Oh—you're the feller ordered and then went out. Was that your ten dollars? I give the change to your friend there. Ask him about it."

"Thanks." Joe swallowed. "I—I guess I will." He looked at the waitress. She was numbly mopping the bar with a grey towel. "I'll go ask him about it right now." It didn't seem to make any difference to her; she just went on mopping. "Yes," said Joe. "Well, thanks."

He walked away from the bar. Maybe he ought to have a little drink first. As the thought occurred to him it was cancelled by a reaction that jolted him to his ankles. He was trembling ever so slightly, all over, when he walked back to the booths.

I'll just say "Hi," easy-like, he told himself. But when he got there he couldn't say anything at all. He put his hands down on the table and leaned on them. He looked at Gordon and wished that little muscle in his cheek would stop twitching.

"Well, will you look what crept in!" said Gordon. "What do *you* want?"

"My money," whispered Joe. He cleared his throat. "My money," he said.

"You lose some money?" Gordon nudged Bette. "He lost his money."

"Better forget it, kid," said Bette.

Joe said, "I left ten dollars here to pay for drinks."

"That's your hard luck," said Gordon. "I don't know nothing about it. Why'n't you save yourself some bad trouble and beat it?"

"Give it to me."

"Look, son—ain't it worth ten bucks to you to keep me from feeding you your teeth? How're you gonna prove anything?"

Joe was suddenly certain that his mouth would form just one more statement before it dried up altogether. He said the only thing that would come into his mind. "Give it to me."

Gordon carefully and ostentatiously adjusted his heavy signet ring. Joe became fearfully aware of what that big ring could do. "I guess I gotta give it to him," said Gordon. He got up and stepped so close to Joe that Joe could smell the liquor on his breath. "Now get outa here," rasped Gordon. He put his open palm against Joe's face and shoved.

Joe stepped backwards, his arms flailing for balance, until the

backs of his knees brought up against a chair, and he fell over it backwards and crashed to the floor on his head and shoulders. He rolled over and tried to get up. Gordon stepped over and kicked him in the stomach, and when he put his hands down, kicked him in the head.

It made a noise inside his head like nothing he had ever heard. Just *blam!* and then the whole world was full of roiling smoke. It began to clear, and he became conscious of a bleating noise—the waitress. He raised his head and looked past the thick columns of Gordon's legs, and saw Bette's face. She was not saying, "Oh, Joe, my Joe . . ." She was smiling, with her mouth half open. He could see almost all her upper teeth. She was smiling at Gordon.

Gordon stepped back as Joe got to his knees and then to his feet. "You kicked me," he said inanely, and then rushed.

He felt his hands close around Gordon's forearms. They felt almost squashy in his grip. He forgot all about dream fights, movie and TV fights, the one-two, the feint and duck and right cross. He bent Gordon's arms until the square hands were fluttering under the baby chin, and he bore down with all the power ten hours a day pulling steering clutches can give.

Gordon went to his knees. "Money," said Joe. He pulled Gordon back on his feet, released his arms, grabbed a handful of hair and hauled Gordon's head back until he could see the skin on the pink throat stretching. Holding him like that, he swung at Gordon's jaw, cheek, nose, eye, mouth, jaw. He kept swinging until Bette screamed. Then he let go, and Gordon came down and over and around his feet like something dumped out of a truck. The waitress was saying, "Stop it! Stop it!"

Joe said, to his own astonishment, "You stop it. You're making all the racket," and went over to Bette. "I want my money," he said.

"I got it," she said. "Gosh, Joe, we were only having fun with you." She opened her handbag and took out a ten-dollar bill, the whole ten dollars, and put it on the table. Joe picked it up and slid it into his wallet, and took out a dollar and gave it to the waitress.

"Throw some water on him," he said.

Bette looked at the feebly stirring figure on the floor. "You didn't need to get mad like that," she said. "Now when he comes to he's going to take it out on me. I'm gettin' out of here." She walked off.

Joe found his hat, picked it up, dusted it off, put it on. Bette was waiting for him outside. The blinking neon did strange things to the colour of her hair.

"Are you going my way?" she asked him, holding his arm.

"What's your way?" She pointed.

He shook his head. She said, "I could go the other way."

He took her hand off his arm. "I got a date," he said.

His head hurt.

He went straight to Sara Nell's house, thinking about what he should say when he saw her. He thought up plenty, but when he stood in the light of her opened door, he forgot it all and said only, "I got the money. They had it, all right."

"Joe! You're hurt!"

"I feel fine." How she got into his arms he couldn't imagine. He held her close and stroked her hair. She didn't turn her face away. His eyes were hot. He said, "You're so little! You're no bigger'n a little old mouse. I oughta call you Mousie."

She said, "All right, Joe."

He held her close, but he was careful, because his arms were so strong he didn't want to hurt her.

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*"... and using an offensive weapon to resist arrest."*

# THE COURTYARD

## BY BILL RODNEY

IT happened quite a few years ago, when that part of Africa was still a reluctant colony. I was about twenty-six, and had been employed in West Africa for just over six months. In this time I had realised that all my preconceived ideas about Africa were wrong, had recovered from my disappointment in finding this so, and was beginning to find for myself the real charms of the West Coast.

I lived in a bachelor flat, with Sam, my cook-steward, and Beano, the houseboy, to look after my creature comforts.

The firm provided a garden boy, whose main function was to water the sun-shrivelled lawn; and a night-watch, whose function was to see that his fellow members of the thieves' union did not descend upon us while we slept. Mensa, the driver, was a shared perquisite, along with the decrepit staff car suitable enough for a rather junior chemist. Apart from driving me through the tin shanty jungle twice a day to and from the flat to my work, Mensa, when suitably "dashed" with West African florins, would drive me to the open-air cinemas, to the beach, and to parties.

I was employed as a manager—or sub manager, it was difficult

to determine which—in a wholesale, retail, optical, photographic, and dispensing druggists. I found that I was expected to develop the eyesight of a hawk, the speed of a sprinter, and a brain like a mathematical computer to accomplish all that my immediate superior, Mr. MacGregor, expected of me. Mac had made it quite clear that he had no hope of my fulfilling his expectations as soon as he realised my brand of Celtic blood was of Welsh origin and not Scottish as he would have preferred.

Mac had gone on trek to visit some of our more remote pharmacies and a few customers in the isolated mission stations and leper camps. I think I should have gone really, but Mac didn't trust me with our new staff car, or else he wanted to play with the new toy himself.

I was left in sole charge, conscious of the responsibility and feeling rather lonely: or, at least, I should have been feeling lonely had I enough time to do so. The days passed quickly, if chaotically. I tried to visit each of the departments as often as I could between checking invoices, making out tender forms for hospital supplies, avoiding drug pedlars—or representatives, as they prefer to be called, and smiling at government types who felt that if they could get on first-name terms with the boss, now that Mac was out of the way, they would secure for themselves huge discounts on the expensive cameras they coveted.

I was called to the optical department to soothe the irate Mrs. Billingsgate who had no faith in the abilities of Miss Daquara, our extremely well-qualified African optician. As I peered into the woman's protruding eyes through what was probably the wrong end of an ophthalmascope, I assured her that I agreed with the sight test, buttered her up a bit, dropped in at the clerk

to see he added at least three guineas to her bill for the trouble. We suffered a lot of Mrs. Billingsgates.

The phone never stopped ringing: "Yes, sir; no sir, in a plain wrapper, I understand." I had a good mind to send them to his home instead of to his office, then his wife would soon prick his little balloon of pomposity; bravely, I withstood the temptation.

A quick run to the dispensary, to assure the General Manager's secretary that the medicine for her boss was correctly made up in accordance with the doctor's prescription even though Mr. MacGregor's writing was not on the label.

And so the hours sped by . . .

In other words the time passed in the usual chaotic manner for which a training in pharmacy is supposed to prepare one. It was a faster pace than usual; even the self-important, colonial officer's wife couldn't buy a lipstick unless under the direct supervision of the manager: "If Mr. MacGregor is indeed away, young man, then I suppose you will have to do . . ."

Dispensing diplomacy takes more time than dispensing prescriptions, consequently the checking of stock records couldn't be finished in working hours, so they had to go home with me.

Checking the records in my own peaceful flat, I discovered we were six hundred razor blades short. I must explain that Mac had a thing about razor blades, so much so that they were stored in the concrete-covered steel safe along with the Achromycin, while the cash takings were kept in the worn, wooden drawer of Mac's office desk.

This was a catastrophe. Mac would be livid. But, worse than that, if hundreds of razor blades could be spirited from under my nose, what else had gone?

I sat up most of the night checking and rechecking; as far as I could see only the razor blades had gone. But I was also very conscious that our establishment contained several hundred pounds' worth of extremely portable stock . . . and that I was responsible. If the thief got away with it this time, there was no telling what would go next. He, or she, must be caught.

Next day, the representatives got very short shrift. I was too busy. The penicillin stocks were O.K.: that was odd because antibiotics fetched a good black-market price and were usually the first target of a thief. The expensive cameras were still all there, but two of them had been moved. Now this was significant. An African rarely steals an object until he has moved it, and left it for a day or so to see if anyone has noticed. Then he moves it again, and so on, until eventually he takes it home with him. The women are usually more direct. This meant it was

more than probable that one of the male staff had taken the razor blades as a try-out, and was now observing me as closely and enthusiastically as I was trying to detect him.

So all I had to do was to spot the one who was watching me . . . The trouble was, they were all watching me. It was obvious that they had deduced something was wrong. That is one thing about the West-Coasters—they are most responsive to mood. It was obvious that I was worried so, kindly souls that they were, they worried with me. I was gloomy, so they gloomed too.

I could, of course, call the Police Department, but the thought appalled me. The political climate had reached new heights and it seemed an even chance that I might be thrown into gaol for making allegations against an unspecified African. Then I thought of the Chief Inspector, who had spent a goodly portion of his inactive life on the West Coast, and remembered that when in the company of a pharmacist, his detecting was restricted to trying to learn of newer and more subtle aphrodisiacs, so finally I decided not to disturb him with my problem. I did not call the police.

I collected all the keys, and added the task of door-locker to my already over-long list of duties. I turned a key in everything that looked remotely like a lock when it was time to close the store.

Usually when I arrived at work in the morning, I found the staff behind the counters with happy faces and a cheery welcome. Now I arranged for Mensa to take me there an hour earlier. I welcomed the staff and saw them off the premises.

We passed the hours in-between very conscious that a wall of mutual distrust separated us. I had no need to search them as they left—the atmosphere was so charged with suspicion that there wasn't a chance of anything unauthorised leaving the premises: I couldn't be everywhere at the same time, but I could exchange my leather-soled sandals for a pair with soles of crêpe. I became a silent white shadow to my assistants.

There was no need for African drums in this district. The grapevine, or bush wire as we called it, worked more efficiently than the telephone; or it may have been that Sam simply responded to my mood. There was no relief even in my own flat. Sam and Beano slouched around the place with a funereal air. The garden boy avoided me like the plague. Only the night-watch had a twinkle in his eyes; I couldn't be sure that that wasn't caused by his professional pride that a—maybe unofficial—member of his union had discomfited yet another European.

My social life came to a standstill. I was leaving work too

late to join the afternoon tea-parties, held in the bungalows of the younger married men. Still, being single had its advantages; at least I could dwell upon my problem undisturbed.

So I spent my evenings wading through the paper work, and then an hour on the beach before bed. But even the beach was spoilt for me now. I used to enjoy the feel of warm sand on my feet, the roar of breakers on the one side contrasting with the whisper of the palm trees on the other, the fringed heads of the palms silhouetted, in the starlight, against the black velvet sky. Now my overtaxed imagination could see darker shadows lurking between the trees. I hurried home, surreptitiously checking that there were no poisonous snakes beneath my bed, or scorpions secreted in the mosquito net.

Two days and a whole lifetime later the now not so new staff car arrived at the office door. I welcomed Mac like a long-lost father, so straightaway he knew that something was wrong. He didn't even ask me what the trouble was; just what was missing, and had I found out in time to stop the whole bloody store going?

He made it quite clear that he wanted both the thief caught and the razor blades back to balance the books.

Mac ordered a major stock-taking. He called in all the senior staff, told them to stay behind so that we could work all the Saturday afternoon, and said that we should be working until every last item had been accounted for. He laid it on a bit thick, how disappointed he was that they would allow his young deputy to be robbed—I felt about two inches high—how it took a raw little European—me!—to discover that we were being robbed. Why hadn't they spotted it and reported it, and so on . . . Mac had a tongue like a whiplash when he cared to use it. That day he cared to use it!

The store was shut for business, and that meant that all the shutters were put up, and we had to work by artificial light. It was like working in an oven; an oven that was not only airless but was steeped in the smell of African sweat, sweetened by the sickly scent of the cosmetics, and made more bitter with the tang of drugs.

Item by item, we worked our way through the immense stock. Bottles of perfume, face-powder, talcs, lipsticks were counted and entered on the pages of the stock book; cough mixtures, pills, laxatives, the thousand and one patent medicines were all counted meticulously and entered on the relevant pages; the photographic stock was checked: films, cameras, enlargers, and all the various impedimenta were recorded in the grease-stained pages. Department by department was examined.

By this time the dust-laden, fetid air had all the more soporific effects of an anaesthetic. It was a struggle to keep on one's feet and almost impossible to continue the tedious counting of bandages, cotton wool, lints... Mac drove us on; he was his usual bundle of energy. The stuffy air, moisture-laden atmosphere, and intense heat seemed to work upon him as a stimulant. We could but attempt to emulate the prodigious efforts of fifty-eight-year-old Mac.

At length he declared himself satisfied: that is, satisfied that the deficiency was no more than I had claimed.

He sent me off, advising a few beers, and then bed.

"Don't worry, lad, we'll get them back tomorrow." But he didn't tell me how he intended to do this . . .

Instead of the beer, I took a trip to the beach. I had almost forgotten what it looked like . . . An African penny, with a hole in the centre, bought me a fresh coconut; that fresh, green coconut juice was worth more to me than a dozen bottles of local-brewed lager. Another penny, and I watched the mammy neatly decapitate another unripe nut with one deft sweep of her clumsy looking machete; then I was ready for a long-overdue swim.

It seemed the same as always . . . the golden sands glittering in the sun, the lines of palms nodding at the on-shore breeze. The surfing seemed good, the large waves breaking just fifty yards out and tumbling white-crested to the shore.

I fetched a surf board and rode a couple of waves in. But even the warm turbulent water couldn't wash away the smell of the store. I wasn't with it. Somehow surfing had lost its familiar thrill. Perhaps Mac was right. . . So I tried a few lagers; they may have helped to make up for the amount of sweat I had lost in the previous days, but they didn't help in any other way. I gave up, and went home.

Sam was waiting with the now familiar anxious expression on his face. I had no appetite and did not feel like sitting down to a meal, but hadn't the heart to refuse the food he had prepared. The fresh cut paw-paw, tanged with the taste of green limes, cleared my palate for the plate of devilled prawns that followed.

Sam as a cook had excelled himself; I wouldn't have missed that meal for the world. I tried a smile at Sam, and it was worth the effort in creasing face muscles not used for days; it seemed to please Sam. I sent him off then, while he was still grinning with pleasure at the effect his efforts over the mahogany-burning stove had produced.

I settled down with a bottle of whisky, to try to figure out how Mac was going to spot the thief.

I had tried the logical methods, eliminating all those who had the opportunity, and that meant the whole staff: two doormen, four porters, eight warehouse clerks, four wholesale storekeepers, six cosmetic assistants, three photographic assistants, the nurse and her two surgical assistants, two drivers, eight drug counter clerks, four apprentices, six dispensers and two qualified native pharmacists. I comforted myself that Mac had spent more years on the Coast than I had weeks; he could probably see more behind their happy, black, benign faces than I even suspected. Perhaps Mac's more discerning Scots eye might penetrate where my Welsh one had failed.

I gave it up and went to bed, leaving tomorrow's problems outside the ample mosquito net. Whisky might help Mac solve the mystery but all it did to me was to send me off into a deep sound sleep, unconscious of the chirruping of nocturnal insects, calls of the prayer men, and the grunts and sighs of the turgid African night.

Mensa collected me early next morning, driving the new staff car for the first time. The novelty of an over-drive had restored him to his usual happy self; he burbled all the way to Mac's bungalow. Mac kept us no longer than was necessary to establish his seniority. Then we joined the milling thrust of traffic to the centre of the city, and to work.

Mac called a conference in his office as soon as we had opened the store. I stood there along with the departmental heads and union representative. It was interesting to watch their expressions when Mac told them that he wanted the name of the thief and the missing stock by twelve o'clock, otherwise he would have to consult a fetish woman. I thought that Mac was joking, but nobody else shared my view. I held my tongue as the now ashen-faced supervisors were dismissed from the office.

I remarked that I thought that his bluff might work. "No bluff about it, laddié," Mac assured me.

There was something about the way he said it that made me drop the subject.

Shortly after twelve, Mac sent for a fetish woman.

The staff collected, group by group, in the sun-washed courtyard at the back of the store. No attempt was made to buy the kinki or kasarva cooked by the colourful cook mammies at their stand just outside the gate of the courtyard. Mac and I had also decided to forgo our lunch. I thought of calling one of the boys to fetch us a beer but hesitated, for it seemed wrong to break the silence of our little oasis of quiet.

I imagined the ride home in the hot staff car, Sam welcoming

me on the threshold with an ice-cold glass of lager, the humidity condensing as droplets on the outside of the glass. My mouth watered . . . In actual fact, Mac and I were hot and uncomfortable, damned uncomfortable.

Clad only in a smearing of white clay and a surfeit of confidence, the lady we were expecting arrived. Most of her retinue were clothed, or at least some efforts had been expended with that end in view: they exuded sheer savagery.

The scene was set. The backcloth was the concrete walls of the courtyard. There was no audience, for somebody had swung closed the courtyard's wooden gates. All that were present had their part to play; the porters, barefooted, khaki clad; the doorkeepers, smarter with their long blue trousers, white tūnics, and much prized peak caps; the girls, neat, if subdued, in their white and grey store-issued dresses, curly hair hidden beneath the white turbans. The men were more sullen than subdued; grey slacks, air-force blue shirts, and contrasting coloured bow ties denoting their relative seniority over the open-necked garb of the apprentices. Miss Daquara was in a cool-looking European-style lightweight flowered dress, and the two pharmacists in long socks, white shorts and shirts, as Mac and I were, their mufti clothes establishing their well-earned professional status.

Contrasting oddly with our civilised Africans was the principal actress of the occasion with her small supporting cast. Their costumes varied from the entirely nonexistent to the multicoloured gaudy mammy cloths slung nonchalantly from the midriff. It was not the splash of colour they made that caught the eye, but the hideous tribal markings, deeply etched into the flesh of their faces, arms, and breasts.

As Mac negotiated the price of the operation with the naked fetish woman, her followers marshalled our staff into a crude circle around the perimeter of the yard.

If anything, the sun was stronger, though strangely I felt cold. I hated this, I was helpless. It was like entrusting a herd of loved and valued sheep to a pack of hungry wolves. I wished to heaven that I had paid for the razor blades myself and pretended the incident had never happened. It was too late.

The fetish woman took her position in the centre of the circle, her helpers placed themselves in strategic positions, and, in effect, surrounded us.

I can't remember whether she danced to start off with, but I do know that she talked to us all. The talk turned to a shuffling dance, and the dance to an impassioned speech.

I couldn't translate her words for she was using a dialect unknown to me, but by now speech was unnecessary for she was using a much more basic language as her gyrations became more frenzied.

She was telling us that she could smell a thief man; that the smell was strong; and that the thief was near. She told us that she would wrench him from the bosom of the earth and cast him high as a sacrifice to the gods of the hills who consumed such as he.

I was fascinated by her story. I found myself panting in sympathy with her heaving chest, yet I was still detached enough to observe the beads of perspiration starting from her rippling skin. It seemed impossible that a body as small as hers could be capable of such prodigious efforts, could contain such vitality, and could exude such power.

She had told her story, and now she was to perform her promise . . .

She bent down and picked up her wand, a stick about three feet long with the thickness of a reed. She swished the wand around her as she stared in turn at all the encircling faces, as though she had not made up her mind upon whom to start. The beads of perspiration had now collected into little rivulets which were washing away the white clay paint into intricate black pathways.

Confronting her first victim, one end of her wand held firmly under her left armpit, her eyes holding his, the other end of the wand inserted under his left armpit, she stood still a moment then gracefully bent backwards. The muscles of her thighs tautened; her belly contracted; and the points of her breasts reached up to the sky as her head and shoulders arched back. The wand bent, and then bent still more as it matched the curve of her back.

Her victim stood motionless.

Suddenly the wand slipped from under his armpit and twanged straight again as the fetish woman recovered it.

Undismayed, the fetish woman stalked stiff-legged round the circle, looking for another victim. Man, boy, and woman, the same procedure was adopted as she selected one after the other. It appeared as though she was playing with them, as though she was trying to lift them from the ground with her own backward motion and the leverage of a thin stick.

By this time I thought that I understood her tactics; like a dynamo making electric current, she was building tension in the hope that the nerve of the thief would break; for this reason her minions were placed at the vantage points of the yard to secure the thief when he made a dash for it.

I turned to explain my theory to Mac, but he silenced me with a savage kick on my ankle.

"Shut up, man," he hissed, "she's in a trance and you could kill her." The pain in my ankle convinced me that Mac was serious.

Her next selection was Teishia, the second apprentice, a big lad, a head taller than I, and with the build of a hefty rugger forward.

He gazed down at her, impassively, as she placed the end of the wand beneath his armpit.

She bent back as before until she was looking at him through the valley of her breasts. This time the wand did not bend. Teishia's feet left the ground. His shadow moved up over the unpacked cases of galenicals behind him. It was impossible for her slight figure and that slender cane to lift the lad. I blinked my eyes; he was still off the ground. I tried to concentrate on the pain in my ankle; I could feel it but still Teishia was suspended in mid-air.

This was no illusion.

The show was over. Teishia was placed back on the ground as the others broke away into excited, talkative groups. He made no attempt to escape.

The fetish came to Mac, the apprentice followed slowly; she wanted to know whether we wished to take further steps against him. Mac declined her offer, and paid her the agreed fee.

Of course, Teishia quite unnecessarily confessed, and led us to where he had secreted the razor blades.

Mac charged my account with an amount to cover the few blades still missing, but insisted that I paid him the fifteen shillings fetish fee in cash.

I look at the receipt occasionally, and every time I do so, I wonder how, and why . . .

© Bill Rodney 1964.

**This real-life hoodoo hoodunit was written under difficulties. "*Cased in plaster of Paris from toe to tail, balancing the* typewriter on my tummy," Bill Rodney wrote us, "I'm faced with two alternatives—to see the keyboard and risk falling out of bed, or to guess where the keys are . . ."**

**Argosy's very best wishes for a happy recovery!**

# At a Distance

**I did but see her passing by,**
**And yet I love her till I die.**

ANON

*It is not you I love—how can it be?*
*I love not Juliet, nor do I crave the fair*
*Ophelia, nor the gentle Beatrice*
*Nor Petrarch's Laura of the golden hair*

*She whom I love is part of old Cathay.*
*She lives with faded-ivory elders, high*
*In a tower of brittle porcelain*
*By the Yellow River, where cormorants fly.*

*Her foot could be enveloped in my hand.*
*Her eyes are tilted, almond-shaped and fine.*
*Her skin is clearer than my lampshade's parchment*
*And her nails are savage, long and carmine.*

*She leans her small head from the trellis, so*
*That swallows, passing, dip and touch her hair.*
*And each night, with a poet's melodies,*
*The flowers of China sing in the night air.*

THEOPHILE GAUTIER, *Chinoiserie*

## *Daffodil Balcony*

He stared at the house across the way, the small, shabby house, and suddenly, as if in answer to his gaze, two wings of windows opened and a girl came out on to the tiny balcony carrying a pot of daffodils. She was a strangely thin girl in a dark pinafore, with a pink handkerchief tied over her hair.

His heart fell out of the side window of the studio, and down to the balcony of the house opposite—buried itself in the pot of daffodils under the half-opened buds and spears of green . . .

KATHERINE MANSFIELD, *Feuille d'Album*

## *Beyond the Green Willow*

*O, she walked unaware of her own increasing beauty*
*That was holding men's thoughts from market or plough,*
*As she passed by, intent on her womanly duties*
*And she without leisure to be wayward or proud;*
*Or if she had pride then it was not in her thinking*
*But thoughtless in her body like a flower of good breeding.*
*The first time I saw her spreading coloured linen*
*Beyond the green willow she gave me gentle greeting*
*With no more intention than the leaning willow tree.*

PATRICK MACDONOGH, *She Walked Unaware*

## *Dear Diary . . .*

8 July. How childish one is! How greedy for a glance! How childish one is! We had gone to Walhheim. The ladies drove out, and during our walk I thought of Lotte's black eyes—I am a fool, pardon me! You should see them, those black eyes! I am brief, for my eyes are dropping with sleep; the ladies were getting in, and round the coach stood young W., Selstadt, Andran and I. Then through the window they gossiped with the fellows, who, to be sure, were light and frivolous enough. I sought Lotte's eyes! Alas! They went from one to another. But on me! me! me who stood there quite alone and lost in her, they did not fall. My heart bid her a thousand farewells! and she did not see me! The coach drove past and a tear stood in my eye. I looked after her and saw Lotte's headgear leaning out of the window and she turned to look back. Was it at me? Friend, it is in this uncertainty that I hover; that is my consolation. Perhaps it was I whom she turned to look at. Perhaps! Good night! O what a child I am!

GOETHE, *Werther*

As he was passing by the house where Jeff Thatcher lived, he saw a new girl in the garden—a lovely little blue-eyed creature with yellow hair plaited into two long tails, white summer frock and embroidered pantalettes. The newcrowned hero fell without firing a shot. A certain Amy Lawrence vanished out of his heart and left not even a memory of herself behind . . .

He worshipped this new angel with furtive eye, till he saw that she had discovered him; then he pretended he did not know she was present, and began to "show off" in all sorts of absurd boyish ways, in order to win her admiration. He kept up this grotesque foolishness for some time; but by and by, while he was in the middle of some dangerous gymnastic performances, he glanced aside and saw that the little girl was wending her way towards the house. Tom came up to the fence and leaned on it, grieving, and hoping she would tarry yet awhile longer.

MARK TWAIN, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

## *What's her History?*

*A blank, my lord. She never told her love,*
*But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,*
*Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought;*
*And with a green and yellow melancholy,*
*She sat like patience on a monument,*
*Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Twelfth Night*

## *Flames and love*

The door-bell rang, and after a second Molly tapped on the drawing-room door and said: "Mr. Gentleman, Mam. He's come to see the girls."

When he walked into the room I knew that I loved him more than life itself.

"Caithleen," he said. He kissed me on the lips. A quick dry kiss, and he shook hands with me. He was shy and strangely nervous. But when I looked into his eyes they were saying the sweet things which they had said before . . .

I just sat there on the high-backed chair, admiring the colours in the turf flames. Every few seconds Mr. Gentleman gave me a look that was at once sly and loving and full of promises. When at last he noticed my new shoes and my legs flattered in the new nylons his eyes dwelt on them for a while as if he were planning something in his mind, and he took a long drink of whisky and said it was time to go.

"See you tomorrow," he said directly to me.

EDNA O'BRIEN, *The Country Girls*

**Spark after glittering spark went**
**curving outward into orbit**

# STAR-CROSSED

## BY EDITH PARGETER

ALL WE wanted was a world.

But ordinary worlds were few and far between, it seemed, in any of the galaxies we had the means of reaching—or else we and the world we'd wrecked weren't so ordinary as we'd thought, and the norm was something quite different and not for us. Because three years after the search began, we still hadn't found what they'd sent us out to find.

We were the third research ship employed on the great probe, the third team tied night and day by watches to those several tons of instruments and equipment that were to locate and document our future planet for us. The one we had would last our lifetime, but children were being born every day, not all of them the shape you'd choose for your children. We hadn't blown up the world, oh, no, reason and moderation had prevailed. Only too late. They'd even given up attributing the distortions to drugs by now, because only comparatively few of the mothers had treatment records that showed the use of new drugs. Nobody had expected a harvest, so long after so gradual and unwary a sowing, but it had come, and whether we liked it or not we had to reap it. A doom is a doom. So there we were in space, looking for a world. Like the old one, only clean.

We were probing the remotest outliers of Galaxy Parthenis I. They named it for its outline as seen from earth, tall and slender, with projecting helmet and spear like the Athena of the Parthenon; and we were fighting shy of both projections, because the physicists' theory was that these jutting lights, brilliant blue, indicated the presence of anti-matter that was being annihilated. The galaxy was a moderately powerful radio-transmitter. I can't remember its exact observed output; nothing like the enormous kilowattage of Cygnus-A, but more than enough to warn us off. But the fringes of the galaxy, out of range of this

violent energy, promised better. Especially Parthenope, remote at Athena's sandalled foot. Quiet, she was, and peaceful to look at, with very little radioactivity and no signs of conflict. So we were dropping in gently to orbit, and training all our instruments on the hopeful planet that might prove a possible host for our descendants.

Thank God I'm not a physicist! What I knew about matter and anti-matter in collision was limited to the things one does at school with cloud-chambers and scintillation-counters, and the trajectory plates we used to study, showing the tracks of anti-protons exploding in stars of fragments after impact with protons. Matter into energy, and energy into matter again. To me it was always a magical interchange; I never wondered at its being dangerous. Magic is dangerous.

No, my job was plain plant biology. Vegetation is stuff you can see, photograph, classify, smell, taste. You can see it with the naked eye from miles up, the unmistakable pattern of woodland and grassland and marshland and upland meadow, the colours and shapes of land. In the night-watches that Gennadi and I kept together, as the junior members of the team, we used to sit and watch the iris-blue belt of Parthenope's zone revolving rosily into its dawn, and map the silvery strands that were rivers and the clear grey eyes of seas, and the dark, lustrous growth of forests like the furry pelts of sleeping beasts. From miles up it looked like home. Why don't we, I said every night, get on down there and settle in? This planet has everything.

There was also movement there, we could trace it with our long-distance probes, and it seemed to be animal, and pastoral at that, because it followed a daily pattern. And that meant that Parthenope had the last asset and the first drawback of a world destined for colonisation. Man. Parthenopeian man—at any rate the intelligence that compiled the pattern that moved the beasts. It was almost inevitable that where all the advantages were, there should the dominant and possessor be also. After a few days of recording and sifting we found plenty of other indications of his presence too, canals, fields, buildings, aircraft.

So we spoke to him from space. We had experts on board who prided themselves that between them they could break any language compiled from any of the sounds producible by the larynx of any known primate, and provide translations in the main tongues of all the known speaking groups, terrestrial or otherwise. They set to work and produced translations into some fifty basic languages of the speech our chief political officer wrote for them, and we started putting it out twenty-four hours a day, aimed at Parthenope. How we came in peace and

good will, bringing greetings from our own planet, how we desired better knowledge of the inhabitants, and intended, with their permission, to effect a landing in order to make their acquaintance. We told them over and over that they had nothing to fear from us, that we meant them nothing but good.

"This is like an echo of ourselves overtaking us," said Gennadi, listening to it on night-watch. "Have you read much history, Francis? 'Don't be alarmed, we want nothing from you but your world!'"

But he was a Slav and a poet, what could you expect? We had about ten Slavs on board in our multi-racial, multi-lingual team, and at least three poets, but the Commodoré was American, and his deputy good, solid Pan-African, so we could afford to carry our dreamers for ballast, like a conscience.

"We've got the next generation to save," I said.

"So have they," he said.

"And whatever their population may be, it doesn't seem to be pushing them. We're not trying to oust them, we'll be quite satisfied to share."

"We always were satisfied to share what was somebody else's," he said. "At least for the first few years."

He was twenty-five, and single, and good-looking, and didn't have any troubles except for a girl in Communications who kept putting herself hopefully in his way; but you'd have thought he'd come down through time along with the Wandering Jew, with a rucksack of doom on his shoulders. He still had the black hair and eyes, and the fiery bones and the tremendous energy of the Georgians—not even world government and five generations of well-mixed marriages could breed that look and that temperament out of them. Some of the less dominant strains had given up the struggle by then, but the strong ones persisted. The English hadn't changed much, either, I knew it every time I looked in the glass. Even my space helmet, before we finally discarded them in craft, used to have a sort of bowler hat look.

"I wonder," I said, "if they'll answer us? If their world has all the favourable conditions ours used to have, why shouldn't they have progressed as far as we have?"

"And since it still has the favourable conditions," said Gennadi, tuning down his viseo-screen to the finest definition, and watching the unbelievable colourings of the Parthenopeian dawn begin, "why shouldn't we conclude that they may have progressed a good deal farther? And why should we suppose they want, any more than they need, our peculiar genius grafted on to their nice, clean world?"

A physicist who is also a poet is liable to have complex vision.

When he's Russian by birth into the bargain, the added complication of a political and philosophic bent is inescapable. But he was a nice fellow to work with; and he was almost always right. He was right that time, too. Parthenope didn't want us.

It happened towards dawn. All our receivers began to crackle as though someone somewhere was feeling his way into their use, gently and easily and confidently, but handling something of a type not encountered before. And then the voice came, full and emphatic, pitched in a low baritone register, repeating the same short message over and over. They had understood us.

The trouble was, we couldn't understand them. Our experts sweated over those almost continuous singing sounds for three days, and couldn't begin to break the pattern. The voice slowed down to half-speed at the third lengthy transmission, but they still couldn't get it. And some of us said, Go in anyway, but the Commodore wouldn't risk it. If they'd understood and answered us, between the two sides there must be a way of working out some kind of two-way communication.

Soon after that the voice stopped, but the transmission was taken over by a very slight, throbbing vibration on a deep note. It was hardly audible, it wasn't language as we understood it; but in a few minutes we felt it transfer itself to the inside of our heads, and go reverberating through our minds. The Parthenopeians had gone further than we had in one way, at least. They could transmit mental concepts, prohibitions, impulses, influences. And what they were telling us was to stay out; what they were saying to us was, No, no, no, you mustn't come!

"So that's how they're going to react! Draft a second and fuller message," said the Commodore, "and tell them exactly why we're here. Explain our need and ask for their help. Then we shall see if they still refuse to let us land."

And we did that, and translated and transmitted it. But the emphatic, unintelligible answer still ticked back to us, and when it again failed to get any acknowledgment the receivers turned on us the same mental battery of absolute rejection. Parthenope wouldn't have us at any price.

"The natives are unfriendly," said Captain Abukaba, and looked haunted for a moment, as though a racial memory had caught up with him. "But we have a sacred duty to our own people, we must not let them be turned away so easily. I say we should go in and land. Then we can negotiate with them man to man."

"Wait," said the Commodore. "Give our lingual experts

more time, they may break into the language yet. This is probably only a misunderstanding."

So we went on orbiting. And that night on watch the receivers were silent; only in our instrument room Gennadi sat with his transmitter switched on, and his screen tuned down upon the dark blue planet, and began to talk to Parthenope as sometimes he talked to himself.

"I am one man," he said, among many other nonsenses, casting his voice and his smile as a fisherman casts a fly. "I am not a soldier, I am not a politician, I am not an enemy of anything that lives. I am a scientist, and curious, and lonely, and you reject me and my curiosity if you reject us. In this ship we have one-man research hulls, how if I should take one and come? How could I be a threat, alone? What would you do if I came?"

I think he had never expected anything, but how can I tell? The blue of the screen was convulsed with a great tremor, and the silent receiver sent out a violent impulse of: No, no, no!

Gennadi said softly: "I am becoming sensitive to this language of the mind. If you had concepts for all those things that move me, and I had any grasp of the concepts you live by, we might talk to each other like this, silently. But how can you convey to me images which don't exist in my world by any name? You warn me off—very well! Am I necessarily to put the worst construction on that, as if you were my own kin? Answer me this: If I went away now, back to my diseased world, would you wish me and mine a fair deliverance by some other means? Do you wish me well?"

A sudden quivering warmth of assent answered him. I felt it as clearly as the No.

He said in a gentle voice: "Parthenope!" From then on everything in him began to change, and on the fringe of the change I could sit and watch, but I could neither join in nor draw him back to me.

He said, "Parthenope, speak to me. Say: I wish you well!"

The receiver sighed, the cloudy screen lost colour, like a troubled pool. In the unknown, singing tongue a voice repeated something faintly; and the voice was a woman's voice, soft, warm and low.

"There is no language anywhere in any world," Gennadi said, "that has no concept for: 'I wish you well!' If the men had no need of it, the women would not be able to live without it." And after a moment of silence he said, "Let me look at you. I know you can, if you will."

She came into the screen; cloudily, brokenly, but she came.

Have you ever wondered how they would look, the inhabitants of a planet enjoying conditions much like our own, even to the single moon? Why should it be the blankest of all surprises, the most stunning of all shocks, that they should turn out to look like us?

I saw her only by glimpses that night, I never saw her clearly, the image was always fluid, like a reflection in water. But I believe that he saw her from the first more clearly than I, and by the end like one defined in fixed and perfect light. She had a face like a human woman's face, but smaller and of a more delicate pallor. I saw a cloud of dark hair in motion round her as though in water, and two great eyes alarmed and bright. I don't know how much she had of beauty, I only know beauty came into the room with her impress, and that the harder I stared the more her image shook, but the distillation of loveliness was never shaken.

I said, "So they look like us!"

"No," said Gennadi, "like our mirror image. They are us reversed. They are what we could have been if we had always chosen the right turning."

He sat looking into the screen, and he said, "You are beautiful." And after a moment, "Do you still say to me that I may not come to you?"

No, the air shuddered, you can't come, you mustn't come! And the face that did not try to speak to him in sounds warned him away with parted lips and fixed eyes.

"But I can't go, now, either. I have seen you now. This is the only world I want."

The screen swirled, and sent her features sparkling away like drops of water, and all the room was convulsed with: No, no, no! Gradually the turmoil settled again, and her eyes came back first, wide, intent and wary. I knew by the look in them, and the way they brightened at the deepening of his smile, that she saw him clearly, and was as lost as he.

"If you wish me well, and this is the only world in which I can ever be happy, why do you send me away?"

The impressions came from her in pulsations that seemed to carry waves of colour with them through the cabin. I didn't even know if I was interpreting her rightly, but he, I am sure, had no longer any doubts. What she had to say was being said to him, not to me, and he was quick and sensitive to meet her every thought, and who am I to say that the contribution of his willingness, no, his rapture, had no scientific validity?

"It is because I wish you well that I want you to go."

"Should I, then, be coming to harm if I came to you?"

"Yes."

"What is harm?" he said. "What is good? Is there a worse harm than to turn away from the only thing you want?"

The questions I heard, the answers no one heard, but he, I think, understood. But I know that to this there was no answer. Only a kind of pause for thought and wonder and self-questioning, as though she lowered her eyes to look more closely at what he showed her. And then she looked up at him again with so naked a radiance that the lines of her face paled away into light.

And she was gone. The deep blue of the world below was fading to iris in the screen, the first saffron of dawn showed upon the arched horizon. She was gone, and he was stiff and silent and wide-eyed over his instruments, and looked up at me blindly when I touched him, as if he had stared into the sun.

He said nothing to me then, and nothing to anyone afterwards, about that encounter. And I said nothing, either. The affair was wholly his, not mine.

He called her again the next night, and she came.

I might not have been there. All night they talked together, and at first there were words on his side, but soon the very words stopped. As she conveyed her will and her mind to him, so he began to speak to her without the need of language. Only sometimes the warm waves of passion and sympathy formed sentences even for me, but whether I was imagining them or whether they were truth I couldn't tell.

It seemed to me that he said, "I will not go away. I will never go away from you."

"You must go. I am afraid for you. You-must go."

"To be afraid is to submit to deformity. Now I want to be whole. Without that there's nothing, no future, no love. And I love you."

"I love you."

"And I will not go."

"No! Don't go!"

"I am coming to you."

The mirror image encompassed even their silent utterances now, and the dialogue had become unison.

He came off watch with me like a man still dreaming. We lay on our bunks in the forward cabin, and he said to me, "Francis, you know, don't you, what happens when two mutually destructive particles collide?"

Half asleep, I said I did. They were destroyed on impact.

"But new particles are generated. Don't forget that. And

supposing these mutually destructive particles had consciousness to feel with, hearts to love with, minds to speculate with, souls to adventure with, and came together of their own will and purpose? What then?"

"Then you'd have left physics for metaphysics."

"Where is the boundary?" he said. "I know of none. Where is the conflict between God and science, when every mystery resolved only uncovers a hundred new mysteries, and every demonstration of energy still leaves us meditating will and intent bigger than the energy? I see no conflict."

Nobody but the Russians and the Indians still orientated themselves by the concept of God. Once I used to think it was because they were natural mystics, but now I'm not sure it isn't because they're natural scientists.

"God is inseparable from science. You might say," said Gennadi deliberately, "that God's most inspired creation is science, and the ultimate achievement of science will be the discovery of God."

"If you like," I said. "But your two animated particles would still be blasted out of existence when they collided, whether it was God or science or both accelerating them."

"But something new would be born, Francis, never forget that," he said, smiling up at the ceiling. "Something new would be born."

And that was the day he went to Professor von Schlucht and the Commodore, and volunteered to go down alone and make contact personally with the Parthenopeians.

I knew nothing about it until afterwards. I slept through the day, and got up a few hours before my watch to hear all about it from the junior who was coming on duty with me in Gennadi's place. It seemed he'd argued the whole proposition out for them in detail, and made complete sense of it. One man landing alone could hardly be construed as a threat. If he succeeded in opening negotiations so that the ship could land, then we'd have accomplished the first stage of our mission. And at worst he could make useful observations which might enable us to make a more effective contact later. It was essential the envoy should be a capable physicist, and surely expedient that he should not be either of the two seniors. I knew him, he could argue his way to anything he wanted. And they'd jumped at his offer, and he was on his way before I was even awake. In the Number 1 hull, a silver shell just big enough to contain him and his micro-equipment.

I was afraid, and I didn't yet know why. I went down to the

cabin, alone, and turned on the radio and the screen, and probed after him. And he came in almost immediately, as if he'd been calling me. Maybe he had. He wasn't so far from us yet.

"Gennadi—what are you up to? Why didn't you tell me?"

"You might have tried to stop me," he said. "Only you had any reason to try. Only you knew. I'm going to my girl, Francis. This is the only way I could get them to send me out. I'm going to her, and she's coming to meet me, up here, clear of her world."

"You're supposed to be landing," I said. "What is this? What are you trying to do?"

"Listen, Francis! Go to the Commodore for me, go now. Tell him to get the ship away from here, as far and fast as he can. Tell them they can never colonise Parthenope, no use hoping. Don't wait for me, I'm not coming back."

"Not coming back? And why is there no hope? Why can't we colonise it?"

"Because matter and anti-matter can't live together. That's why they've been warning us away. We thought, when we found almost no radioactivity, that it must be because there was no anti-matter present. But we were wrong. There's no conflict *because there's no matter*. The whole of Parthenope is composed of anti-matter! Tell them! Tell them to get away from here."

"But *you*!" I howled at him. "If this is true, for God's sake, what do you think you're doing? *Anti-matter!* If you even touch her hand—"

"I know!" he said, and he smiled. "Good-bye, Francis!"

His face flickered out.

I went scrambling and leaping up the companionway and into the control room; I shouted at them what he'd said, what he'd done. I should have known, I should have guessed before, when the two soundless voices melted from counterpoint into unison, when he talked of mutually destructive particles, and of the mirror image of man that was at once his twin and antithesis. I should have known when he spoke of adding will and purpose to the collision of opposites, so that annihilation might become as it were union, and the generation that resulted might launch upon creation new particles of matter, the first fruits of reconciliation. I should have known when the woman said no, and no, and no, while all the time her eyes were saying yes.

We rushed to the screens, we called and called him. The Commodore ordered him back to the ship, but he never made any answer again, and he never looked back. What more was there we could do? We set course outward at speed, and withdrew into space, and still we hung over the screen and watched the thin silvery fish recede from us.

"He'll never touch ground," said the Professor, wringing his hands over the dials. "He'll burn up as he enters the atmosphere."

"She's coming to meet him. He said so. Coming to meet him, clear of her world. They know, they both know. They don't want to be saved."

"They'll both die. There's no other possibility."

Gennadi would have said, What is death? Gennadi would have said, But something new will be born, never forget that. Something new will be born.

We watched the iris-blue curve of Parthenope's zone, where a scintillating point of silver had soared and hung in air. She was coming as she had promised. They drew towards each other in two great arcs, flawlessly, and then his hull touched the atmosphere and sheared into it like a glowing knife, leaving a trail of fiery light behind. They were good hulls, triple-proofed and made to survive high speeds. He lived to meet her, though the outer shell of his craft was molten fire by then. Parthenis I had a new star.

What could we do but hold our breath and watch, as they came together? They had slowed to touch, and in the instant that the two light shells kissed there was a blinding flash that turned all the limpid dark to day. The sound came late, it was in silence that the shell of metal glowed from orange to white, and disintegrated from round him. In the heart of the unbearable brightness we saw the two small ships drip into liquid, and the golden drops consume away in the heat before they even had form. We saw them embrace, those two terrible lovers, a fused shape of shadow in the heart of the aurora, a man and a woman locked in each other's arms, Gennadi and Parthenope matched and mated for the first and last and only time.

They were the core of a new sun, and then they were light itself, and a cry, and the following thunder-clap was like a fanfare for their incredible marriage.

One instant, and then we saw them no more, we could not look, the brightness burnt our eyes, we hid our faces and clung to our controls, and ran and ran from the cataclysm, out of the galaxy, scorched and limping, back towards our own maimed world. But long hours afterwards, when we dared to look back, there was a lamp still blazing in the place where they had vanished, and outward from its deep, red heart, eddying away on their own inscrutable courses, spark after glittering spark went curving and flying, outward into orbit, outward into space, the firstborn of the children of light.

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*Strickland saw the horrible grin on the man's face —and shivered*

# LAST ANSWER

## BY HAL ELLSON

DOWNTOWN is a tomb after six o'clock. Come up from the subway at midnight and you can walk for blocks through the sidestreets and meet no one—not a single soul.

Broadway isn't much different—a little traffic, a few pedestrians, dark brooding buildings, with a light here and there where a cleaning woman is doing her chores.

Strickland stopped off at Carey's Bar. It was quiet there—a few office workers drinking. He ordered; all he wanted was a quick one, but a great deal of work waited for him at the office and the night was hot. So he had another, then a third before he stepped outside.

Immediately he was made aware of the buildings towering over Broadway, sombre and silent, yet neither dead nor asleep; with a thousand shadowed eyes they kept their watch over the street,

Strickland turned into a narrow sidestreet, his shadow stretched before him enormously, his footsteps echoing. He came to the building where he worked, and entered. The lobby was empty, and the single elevator door was open.

He walked to it, expecting to be greeted by sleepy-eyed Pat. Instead, a new operator was there, standing stiffly at attention, at twelve-thirty on a hot night in an almost empty building.

"Floor, please?"

Strickland almost laughed, then caught himself. "Thirteen," he answered.

The door closed abruptly, and the car shot upwards at full speed, while the new operator stood at attention, ramrod-straight. Another misplaced general, Strickland thought, and on a sweltering night like this.

The car halted at the thirteenth floor. The operator reached out to open the door, stopped his hand, and turned.

His eyes were like two black stones, his face a pale mask.

"Well, aren't you going to open the door?" Strickland asked.

"A question, sir."

"Let's have it."

"Are you for freedom or for slavery?"

Strickland wanted to laugh, but the man was dead serious, waiting, impatience smouldering in his black eyes.

He's either drunk or crazy, Strickland decided, no longer amused by the situation he found himself in—alone, thirteen floors up in an elevator with this strange character. He stared back at the man, wondering which side he favoured. To give the wrong answer might—

"I'm for freedom," Strickland answered.

"The correct answer," said the operator, abruptly opening the door.

Strickland stepped out and went down the dim hall to his office. He was somewhat ruffled by the incident. I wonder what would have happened, he thought, if I hadn't given the right answer . . .

An hour later the elevator door opened on the thirteenth floor. Strickland heard it from his private office, then heard footsteps on the marble floor. He raised his head, wondering. It was too early for the night watchman to be passing through.

The office door opened and closed. Strickland turned in his swivel chair and waited. A shadow darkened the frosted glass of the door.

"Who's that?" Strickland asked.

The door swung open, and there stood the elevator man. "I hope you're not too busy," he said.

"I've a report to finish by morning, but what is it?"

"Another question, sir."

Strickland wanted to order the fellow out, but he restrained himself. Obviously this fool was drunk. He had to be, and it would be better to humour him. "All right, what's the question?"

"Are you for truth or for lies?"

"For truth," Strickland said quickly. "Now if you don't mind . . ."

"One moment, please."

"Yes?"

"You're quite sure you believe that?"

"Quite sure. Now will you please go."

The elevator man stood motionless, as if he hadn't heard, then turned to the door, opened it, and looked back.

"I believe you," he said soberly.

"Thanks," Strickland answered. The door closed behind him. The report lay on his desk, but he didn't go back to it. Instead, he listened. Footsteps sounded in the hall. Finally the elevator door clanged shut.

Strickland reached for the phone to call the building superintendent. He wanted that stupid elevator operator off his back. He picked up the phone, then dropped it and smiled. After all, a complaint might cost the elevator man his job.

The night didn't cool off. At three a.m. not a breath of air stirred. Strickland pushed away the report, wiped his face, got up and left his desk. The water cooler was in the big office. He'd gone to it half a dozen times already.

Now as he filled another paper cup he again heard footsteps in the hall.

The night watchman, he thought, and the front door opened, closed. Footsteps padded towards the receptionist's empty desk, passed it, and softened on deep carpet. Suddenly the elevator man stepped from behind a glass partition.

Strickland stood perfectly still, the paper cup forgotten in his hand. From the other end of the room he watched the elevator man go to the office he'd just left, pause in front of the door, then go in.

Only a few moments later the elevator man came out. Strickland still hadn't moved. His best chance was to remain quiet and perhaps the fellow would go away.

But the elevator man didn't go away. Stopping, he surveyed the big office, sweeping the empty desks with his eyes. Against the far wall he saw Strickland's shadow, then Strickland himself gaping at him and at the gun in his hand.

The elevator man smiled.

"So there you are," he said, and started towards him.

Strickland tried to tell himself that this was some kind of joke, or nightmare. It certainly wasn't real. But the gun was, and obviously a madman was holding it. Everything came together now—the foolish questions, the queer face of the man, his fanatic eyes.

I've got to get that gun from him, Strickland told himself.

The elevator man grinned and aimed the gun at him. "All right, let's see how smart you are," he said. "You have another question to answer. Maybe this time you'll flunk it."

Strickland began to protest, but only to gain time. The night watchman should be here any minute.

"Shut up," said the elevator man. "Get ready to think, and you'd better have the right answer. Now, what are you for—

love or hate? You've got ten seconds to give me the correct answer."

The correct answer was obvious—or was it, with a madman rendering judgment? Strickland bit his under lip. The elevator man was counting the seconds.

"All right, time's up," he said, motioning with the gun.

"Love!" said Strickland, and the elevator man smiled at him.

"Very good," he said, lowering the gun. "I had an idea you'd slip this time, but you didn't. You're a very intelligent chap."

"So are you," Strickland answered quickly. "I'm sure you are, and that being the case, I know you'll listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"Look, if you hand me that gun, the whole matter will be forgotten. If you don't..."

"What then?"

"You'll find yourself in a lot of trouble. In another minute the night watchman will be here to clock in."

"The night watchman?" The elevator man smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid you're mistaken."

"What do you mean?"

"He didn't pass the test."

"What test?"

"The same one you just passed. You see, I met him down below and he wasn't as smart as you. This happens to be his gun."

"You mean you killed the old man?"

"But what else? He was stupid. He couldn't answer the question correctly."

Strickland sucked in his breath, and then the phone rang in his office. He looked at the elevator operator. "I'd better answer, don't you think?" he said.

"I'll answer," the elevator operator said, aiming the gun at him again. "Come along."

They walked into the office and the elevator operator lifted the phone.

"Hullo," he said, and listened for a few moments. Then he cradled the instrument and smiled at Strickland. "A message for you. What's your name?"

"Strickland."

"Well, you're not to leave this office until you're informed to do so. You see, there's an insane man roaming the building. He's dangerous—a killer."

Strickland met the elevator operator's gaze. He saw the horrible grin on the man's face and shivered.

"Now, Mr. Strickland, what do you think?"

"Think?"

"Ah, you look confused. Perhaps you're frightened, but don't be. You're a very intelligent chap. Now one more question—the last question.

"Am I sane or insane? You have exactly ten seconds to answer correctly."

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# Shadow of St Germain

## By JOHN ADRIAN

BUT why doesn't she go back to the Tuileries?"

Sister Agnes had been sent for from the Hôtel Dieu to nurse the Queen Mother. She disapproved of Catherine de Médicis' apartments in the chateau of Blois. The clamour of the courtyard was disturbing to her patient—Sister Agnes thought of her as "her" patient rather than Dr. Busoni's—and the only source of hot water was the kitchen, four steep flights below—she was still puffing from the climb. The riverside palace which Catherine had almost finished building—all those years ago—on the site of the old tile-works beside the Louvre would have been quieter for the invalid and much, much more convenient for the nurse!

So it was not without feeling that Sister Agnes panted, "But why doesn't she go back to the Tuileries?"

"I thought everyone knew that."

The lady-in-waiting's voice had a scornful, Italian lilt: Catherine de Médicis had always insisted on importing her own people to be about her.

"Her Majesty had her horoscope drawn when they were just finishing the palace, and that old witch Lavallette told her she would die in the shadow of St Germain."

St Germain l'Auxerrois was the parish church of the Louvre and the Tuileries, as Sister Agnes knew.

"So," Antonina Pazzi continued, "she decided to cheat death by coming here to Blois. It doesn't seem to have done her any good in the end."

The Pazzi had never liked the Médicis.

"You cannot cheat death," Sister Agnes responded, rather automatically. "Or God either." She was mildly interested rather than shocked. Nuns, especially of the nursing Orders,

saw all kinds of superstition, and by no means only among the poor and ignorant.

"Ssh!"

Another of Queen Catherine's imports, Dr. Busoni came from Salerno, and even in the stifling heat of the tightly sealed room he wore his long furred robe. He now lifted a bony finger to his lips; then he parted the heavy curtains of the bed. The patient was waking.

"Antonina!"

The voice that had for so long commanded the turbulent factions, charmed the treasures of Italy and the East to Paris and cowed the godless (all except that arch-heretic Henry of Navarre, who would have sent the Devil himself packing if he had not been in league with him) was now only a wheezing croak. The arrogant face, as Sister Agnes, craning forward, could see, was puffy and purplish. The flashing rings would never come off those swollen hands again.

They were fumbling. The eyes, half open, seemed sightless.

"Antonina . . . my beads . . ."

Antonina rummaged among the objects which littered the huge bed—trinkets, handkerchiefs, amulets, and holy medals; only Dr. Busoni had seen, with sardonic amusement, other and less orthodox specifics under the pillows: a dried toad, a curious green-stone figurine and a little bag of herbs which had no medicinal application. Sister Agnes watched Antonina find a rosary of matched pink pearls, which had cost Catherine's Venetian agent a pretty sum, and place it under the groping fingers.

The once tight lips began to mumble; but the prayers, if they were prayers, were incoherent.

Dr. Busoni beckoned Sister Agnes over to a table near the windows.

"I think it will end soon," he said as he measured liquids into a silver cup.

"Please go and fetch Father Menotti. This will keep her going for a little, but not for long. You'd better hurry."

The nun scurried off.

Busoni supported the patient's head while she drank. After a while she opened her eyes again. She seemed to be making a violent effort to organise her thoughts.

"Busoni . . . Antonina . . . What is this place?"

"You are in your own apartments, Madame, at Blois where you have always been." Antonina propped the pillows and straightened the coverlet. "Listen—you can hear the noise from the town." And indeed they could.

"Still here then . . . I know you want to take me back to the Tuileries—perhaps when I'm asleep. I've heard you talking. But I won't go, do you hear? I'll stay here . . . always . . . I must stay here . . ."

They tried to soothe her, but the furious croaking went on.

"You know what Lavallette said—the shadow of St Germain. I won't go back to St Germain, ever—I must stay here."

Busoni said, to reassure her, "You are staying here, Madame. And Father Menotti will tell you the same. He is on his way."

This only made things worse. Catherine's brain seemed more active now, even though her body could no longer obey it.

"For the Last Rites, eh? There's no point . . . When I need them I'll ask for them. I'm not dying . . . I can't be dying, not here . . . Lavallette was always right . . ."

"No, no, Madame," Busoni lied glibly. "Father Menotti is coming to see you as he does every afternoon, only he has to come earlier today."

Then, under his breath, to Antonina, "What the devil is keeping that nurse? She only had to cross the courtyard . . ."

Catherine was quiet now. Busoni kept his finger on her pulse.

At last Sister Agnes appeared in the doorway. She was followed not by the elderly Father Menotti but by a stranger, a tall priest in the Jesuit habit.

"Father Menotti has bronchitis," she explained, panting. "I had to go on to St Nicolas to find Monsignor . . ."

"Ssh!" Busoni, bending over the Queen Mother, silenced her once more. Then, straightening up, he said urgently, "Good day, Monsignor. I am afraid there is no time to lose. Have you all you require?"

"Yes," the Jesuit said briskly. He opened a small case and swiftly set out the vessels on a side table. Then he began to intone the rite.

All through the ritual Catherine had lain pallid and unmoving, with only the slightest rising of the coverlet to show that she was still breathing. Nothing suggested that she realised what was going on. But now, the rite over, she opened her eyes. They hardened on the Jesuit.

"You're not Father Menotti!"

"No, Madame. Father Menotti is sick. I have come in his place."

"But who—who are you?"

"Madame, I am Monsignor de St Germain."

He came forward from the window. His shadow fell across the bed.

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# argosy's Shakespeare Award

# £250 FOR THE BEST ORIGINAL SHORT STORY

This year, the eyes of the world will be on Stratford where 400 years ago William Shakespeare was born. As we think perhaps of schooldays, courtship, deer-stealing, play-writing, acting before Queen Elizabeth or the citizens of London, moving in court circles or roistering in taverns, it is Shakespeare himself that we most want to see, to meet, to get to know. Shakespeare the man, the playwright, the actor, the poet, the father of his children; Shakespeare as friend, or lover, or citizen of Stratford.

**Argosy invites you to create Shakespeare, the man himself, in a short story. Shakespeare—as you see him.**

Choose your own plot; invent, imagine. One possible approach might be that in your story Shakespeare encounters *someone, imagined or real, who was the prototype for a* character in any of his plays, for instance :—

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, HENRY V,
MACBETH, KING LEAR, TWELFTH NIGHT, HAMLET,
THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, THE TEMPEST

Someone whose love, friendship, enmity, chance acquaintance, or what you will, brought the dramatist the first-hand experience from which a character in the plays grew in his mind.

**Step back across the centuries, find and portray in your own terms and in modern language (not imitation Elizabethan, please!) Shakespeare himself, the greatest of our dramatists.**

## JUDGES :

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**IVOR BROWN, C.B.E.**
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**M. ST. CLARE BYRNE, O.B.E.**
Governor, Royal Shakespeare Theatre

**JOHN NEVILLE**
Theatre Director, Nottingham Playhouse

**and the EDITOR of ARGOSY**

# argosy's

# Shakespeare Award

Argosy's Award of £250 will be made to the writer of the best original short story submitted, portraying Shakespeare. The Award is open to all authors, professional or amateur. Argosy's aim is also to find and encourage new, young, or as yet little-known writers. The award may be divided if the Judges so advise.

**STORIES** of Argosy calibre, *with good plot structure, action, and characterisation* are more likely to appeal to the Judges than slight incidents or episodes. The first-rate story which Argosy readers expect and enjoy is the type of story to win the Award. Young competitors and new writers are advised to look at á recent issue of Argosy.

**LENGTH** is a matter for the writer. A well-told story fixes its own length, but extremes should be avoided. A story of 12,000 words would have to be exceptionally good, and one of, say, only 1,000 words superlatively good, to win the Award. From 3,000 to 6,000 words is perhaps the most practical length.

**ENTRIES** must be submitted on or before April 30th, 1964. The announcement of the Shakespeare Award will be made in the September number of Argosy, published August 7th.

**ALL ENTRIES** to be sent to:

ARGOSY'S SHAKESPEARE AWARD,
1-2 Bear Alley,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.4.

(Comp.)

**BEFORE POSTING** your story, please make sure you have complied with the conditions of entry.

## CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

1 Each story submitted must be clearly typed, in double spacing, on one side of the paper only. Your full name and permanent address in BLOCK CAPITALS must appear on the front page of your story, with the following signed statement : I declare this story to be my own original work. Your surname should appear at the head of each succeeding page. If you enter two or more stories, they must be sent enclosed together.

2 All stories must be sent by post, clearly addressed and correctly stamped, to : ARGOSY'S SHAKESPEARE AWARD, 1-2 BEAR ALLEY, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4. (COMP.).

Typescripts must reach this address not later than Thursday, April 30th, 1964, the closing date.

3 All entrants between the ages of 16 and 30 are asked to give their age on the front page of their story. (You must be at least 16 years of age to qualify for the Award.)

4 All stories entered for the Award must be unpublished work, written in English.

5 Stories will not be returned unless an adequately stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed—allowing for registered post if desired. (Overseas entrants at long distance are advised to send their stories by air mail ; in their case, return postage must be tendered by money order or International Reply Coupon to the required value, but may be at surface rate.)

6 While every care will be taken to ensure the safe return of manuscripts, Argosy will not be responsible in any circumstances for loss, damage or delay in the post or otherwise, and no correspondence will be entered into on this or any other matter concerning the competition.

7 The winner of the Award will be required to assign all rights in the winning story to Argosy.

8 If the Editor of Argosy considers that none of the stories submitted merits the Award, the Award will not be made. The decision of the Judges, and of the Editor of Argosy in all other matters affecting this competition, will be final and legally binding.

9 Employees (and their families) of both the printers and proprietors of Argosy, and of associated companies, are not eligible to compete.

# RAYMOND CHANDLER

# KILLER IN THE RAIN

## No 2 THE MAN WHO LIKED DOGS

IT'S surprising to remember that Raymond Chandler, although actually born in Chicago in 1888, was brought up in England, and had a thorough-paced English schooling at Dulwich College (where he excelled at the classics). Perhaps it was those Latin hexameters that gave him his tremendous grip on language—"I don't read Chandler for the story," an addict once said, "I read him for the cracks." It's true that—putting on one side those brilliantly intricate plots—there's nothing quite so stimulating as Chandler-talk. Pick any page at random, it's peppered with 3-star quotes: "His smile was as stiff as a frozen fish"—"He pawed my office with his eyes"—"His tie had apparently been tied with a pair of pliers"—"Smoke lisped from the chimney" . . . Anyway, to go on with Chandler's story: after Dulwich College and war service from 1917-18 with the Gordon Highlanders, he went to Los Angeles, where, it is plain from the settings of his books, he felt at home straight away. In no time he became an executive in five oil companies, was thrown on the world when they all collapsed in the slump—and the rest you know. He took to writing and, by 1959 when he died, was read throughout the world.

"The Man Who Liked Dogs," second in our series of Chandler's early stories hitherto uncollected, was originally published in Black Mask in 1936. Later he altered, expanded, and mixed it with other strands to form the nucleus of his famous novel "Farewell, My Lovely." Chandler connoisseurs can put their feet up and have an

**absorbing time sleuthing out the origins of the better-known book in this brilliant story, while for those readers who by some mischance have so far missed out on Chandler, it makes a first-rate introduction to his hardboiled genius. Whether you read him for the plot or the cracks, there's no one quite like Chandler—Argosy is proud to present this new series.**

THERE was a brand-new aluminium-grey DeSoto sedan in front of the door. I walked around that and went up three white steps, through a glass door and up three more carpeted steps. I rang a bell on the wall.

Instantly a dozen dog voices began to shake the roof. While they bayed and howled and yapped I looked at a small alcove office with a rolltop desk and a waiting-room with leather chairs and three diplomas on the wall, at a table scattered with copies of the *Dog Fancier's Gazette.*

Somebody quieted the dogs out back, then an inner door opened and a small pretty-faced man in a tan smock came in on rubber soles, with a solicitous smile under a pencil-line moustache. He looked around and under me, didn't see a dog. His smile got more casual.

He said, " I'd like to break them of that, but I can't. Every time they hear a buzzer they start up. They get bored and they know the buzzer means visitors."

I said, " Yeah," and gave him my card. He read it, turned it over and looked at the back, turned it back and read the front again.

" A private detective," he said softly, licking his moist lips. " Well—I'm Sharp. What can I do for you? "

" I'm looking for a stolen dog."

His eyes flicked at me. His soft little mouth tightened. Very slowly his whole face flushed.

I said, " I'm not suggesting *you* stole the dog. Almost anybody could plant an animal in a place like this and you wouldn't think about that chance they didn't own it, would you? "

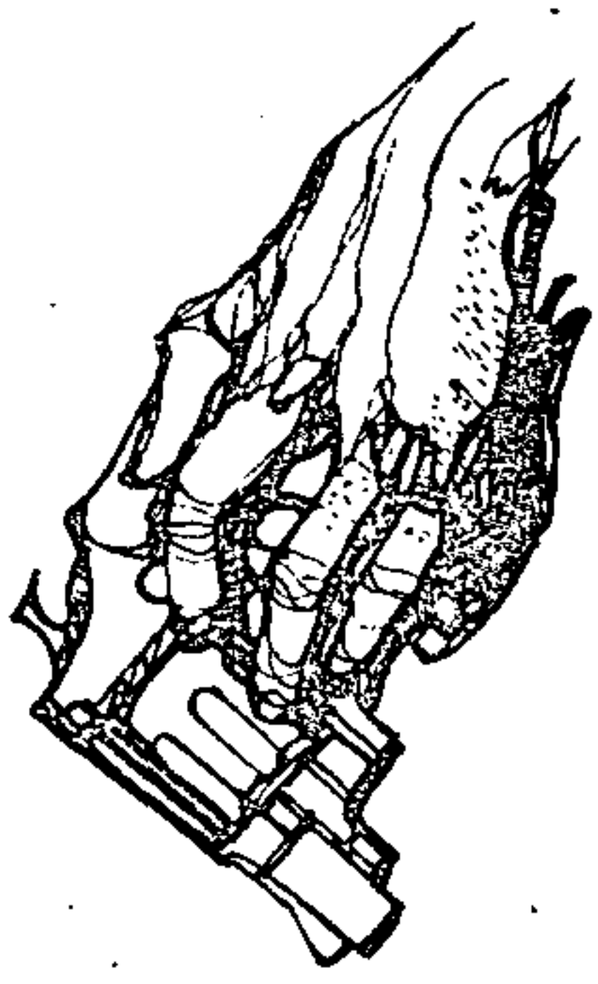
" One doesn't just like the idea," he said stiffly. " What kind of dog? "

" Police dog."

He scuffed a toe on the thin carpet, looked at a corner of the ceiling. The flush went off his face, leaving it with a sort of shiny whiteness. After a long moment he said, " I have only one police dog here, and I know the people he belongs to. So I'm afraid—"

" Then you won't mind my looking at him? " I cut in, and started towards the inner door.

Sharp didn't move. He scuffed some



more. " I'm not sure that's convenient," he said softly. " Perhaps later in the day."

" Now would be better for me," I said, and reached for the knob.

He scuttled across the waiting-room to his little rolltop desk. His small hand went around the telephone there.

" I'll—I'll just call the police if you want to get tough," he said hurriedly.

" Ask for Chief Fulwider. I just came from his office."

Sharp took his hand away from the phone. I grinned at him and rolled a cigarette around in my fingers.

" Come on," I said. " Shake the hair out of your eyes and let's go. Be nice and maybe I'll tell you the story."

He chewed both his lips in turn, stared at the brown blotter on his desk, fiddled with a corner of it, stood up and crossed the room, opened the door in front of me and we went along a narrow grey hallway. We went through a door farther along, into a bare room with a concrete floor, a gas heater in the corner with a bowl of water beside it, and all along one wall two tiers of stalls with heavy wire mesh doors.

Dogs and cats stared at us silently, expectantly, behind the mesh. A tiny chihuahua snuffled under a big red Persian with a wide sheepskin collar around its neck. There was a sour-faced Scottie and a mutt with all the skin off one leg and a silky-grey Angora and a Sealyham and two more mutts and a razor-sharp fox terrier with a barrel snout and just the right droop to the last two inches of it.

Their noses were wet and their eyes were bright and they wanted to know whose visitor I was.

I looked them over. " These are toys," I growled. " I'm talking police dog. Grey and black, no brown. A male. Nine years old. Swell points all around except that his tail is too short. Do I bore you? "

He stared at me, made an unhappy gesture. " Yes, but—" he mumbled. " Well, this way."

We went back out of the room. The animals looked disappointed, especially the chihuahua, which tried to climb through the wire mesh and almost made it. We went back out of a rear door into a cement yard with two garages fronting on it. One of them was empty. The other, with its door open a foot, was a box of gloom at the back of which a big dog clanked a chain and put his jaw down flat on the old comforter that was his bed.

" Be careful," Sharp said. " He's pretty savage at times. I had him inside, but he scared the others."

I went into the garage. The dog growled. I went towards him and he hit the end of his chain with a bang. I said, " Hullo there, Voss. Shake hands."

He put his head back down on the comforter. His ears came forward halfway. He was very still. His eyes were wolfish, black-rimmed. Then the curved, too-short tail began to thump the floor slowly.

I said, " Shake hands, boy," and put mine out. In the doorway behind me the little vet was telling me to be careful. The dog came up slowly on his big rough paws, swung his ears back to normal and lifted his left paw. I shook it.

The little vet complained, " This is a great surprise to me—"

" Yeah, it would be," I said.

I patted the dog's head and went back out of the garage.

We went into the house, into the waiting-room. I pushed magazines out of the way and sat on a corner of the table, looked the pretty little man over.

" O.K.," I said. " Give. What's the name of his folks and where do they live? "

He thought it over sullenly. " Their name is Voss. They've moved east and they are to send for the dog when they're settled."

" Cute at that," I said. " The dog's named Voss after a German war flier. The folks are named after the dog."

" You think I'm lying," the little man said hotly.

" Uh-uh. You scare too easy for a crook. I think somebody wanted to ditch the dog. Here's my story. A girl named Isobel Snare disappeared from her home in San Angelo two weeks ago. She lives with her great-aunt, a nice old lady in grey silk who isn't anybody's fool. The girl had been stepping out with some pretty shady company in the night spots and gambling joints. So the old lady smelled a scandal and didn't go to the law. She didn't get anywhere until a girlfriend of the Snare girl happened to see the dog in your joint. She told the aunt. The aunt hired me—because when the niece drove off in her roadster and didn't come back she had the dog with her."

I mashed out my cigarette on my heel and lit another. Sharp's little face was as white as dough. Perspiration twinkled in his cute little moustache.

I added gently, " It's not a police job yet. I was kidding you about Chief Fulwider."

" What—what do you want me to do? " the little man stammered.

" Think you'll hear anything more about the dog? "

" Yes," he said quickly. " The man seemed very fond of him. A genuine dog lover. The dog was gentle with him."

" Then you'll hear from him," I said. " When you do I want to know. What's the guy look like? "

" He was tall and thin with very sharp black eyes. His wife is tall and thin like him. Well-dressed, quiet people."

" The Snare girl is a little runt," I said. " What made it so hush-hush? "

He stared at his foot and didn't say anything.

" O.K.," I said. " Business is business. Play ball with me and you won't get any adverse publicity. Is it a deal? " I held my hand out.

" I'll play with you," he said softly, and put a moist fishy paw in mine. I shook it carefully, so as not to bend it.

I told him where I was staying and went back out to the sunny

street and walked a block down to where I had left my Chrysler. I got into it and poked it forward from around the corner, far enough so that I could see the DeSoto and the front of Sharp's place.

I sat like that for half an hour. Then Sharp came out of his place and got into the DeSoto. He drove it off around the corner and swung into the alley that ran behind his yard.

Then the DeSoto backed out of the alley. A big police dog with a muzzle on his head was chained in the back of the sedan. I could just see his head straining at the chain.

I trailed the DeSoto.

★

CAROLINA STREET was away off at the edge of the little beach city. There were just two houses in the last block, so I hid behind the first, which was on the corner, with a weedy grass plot and a high dusty red and yellow lantana fighting with a honeysuckle vine against the front wall.

Beyond that was a ramshackle mud-coloured bungalow with a wire fence. The DeSoto stopped in front of it.

Its door slammed open and Sharp dragged the muzzled dog out of the back and fought him through a gate and up the walk.

I put my stomach down in the weeds and sighted on the bungalow and waited. Boomingly on the afternoon air came the deep-toned woof-woofing of the police dog.

Nothing happened for about fifteen minutes except that the dog kept right on barking. Then the barking suddenly got harder and harsher. Then somebody shouted. Then a man screamed.

I picked myself up and sprinted. As I got near the house I heard the low, furious growling of the dog worrying something, and behind it the staccato rattle of a woman's voice, in anger more than in fear.

I went through the gate and thumped up wooden steps to a sagging porch. I banged on the door.

The growling was still going on inside, but the scolding voice had stopped. Nobody came to the door. I tried the knob, opened the door, and went in. There was a heavy smell of chloroform.

In the middle of the floor, on a twisted rug, Sharp lay spread-eagled on his back, with blood pumping out of the side of his neck. The blood had made a thick glossy pool around his head. The dog leaned away from it, crouched on his forelegs, his ears flat to his head, fragments of a torn muzzle hanging about his neck. His throat bristled and the hair on his spine stood up and there was a low pulsing growl deep in his throat.

Behind the dog a cupboard door was smashed back against the wall and on the floor of the cupboard a big wad of cottonwool sent sickening waves of chloroform out on the air.

A dark handsome woman in a print house dress held a big automatic pointed at the dog and didn't fire it.

She threw a quick glance at me over her shoulder, started to turn.

The dog watched her, with narrow, black-rimmed eyes. I took my Luger out and held it down at my side.

Something creaked and a tall black-eyed man in faded blue overalls and a blue work-shirt came through the swing door at the back with a sawed-off double-barrel shotgun in his hands. He pointed it at me.

"Hey, you! Drop that gat!" he said angrily.

I moved my jaw with the idea of saying something. The man's finger tightened on the front trigger. My gun went off—without my having much to do with it. The slug hit the stock of the shotgun, knocked it clean out of the man's hands. It pounded on the floor and the dog jumped sideways about seven feet and crouched again.

With an utterly incredulous look on his face the man put his hands up in the air.

I couldn't lose. I said, "Down yours too, lady."

She worked her tongue along her lips and lowered the automatic to her side and walked away from the body on the floor.

The man said, "Hell, don't shoot him. I can handle him."

I blinked, then I got the idea. He had been afraid I was going to shoot the dog. He hadn't been worrying about himself.

I lowered the Luger a little. "What happened?"

"That —— tried to chloroform—*him*, a fighting dog!"

I said, "Yeah. If you've got a phone, you'd better call an ambulance. Sharp won't last long with that tear in his neck."

The woman went along the wall to a window seat full of crumpled newspapers, reached down for a phone at one end of it. I looked down at the little vet. His face was the whitest face I had ever seen.

"Never mind the ambulance," I told the woman. "Just call Police Headquarters."

The man in the overalls put his hands down and dropped on one knee, began to pat the floor and talk soothingly to the dog.

"Steady, old-timer. Steady. We're all friends now—all friends. Steady, Voss."

The dog growled and swung his hind end a little. The man kept on talking to him. The dog stopped growling and the hackles on his back went down. The man in overalls kept on crooning to him.

The woman on the window seat put the phone aside and said, "On the way. Think you can handle it, Jerry?"

"Sure," the man said, without taking his eyes off the dog.

The dog let his belly touch the floor now and opened his mouth and let his tongue hang out. The tongue dripped saliva, pink saliva with blood mixed in it. The hair at the side of the dog's mouth was stained with blood.

The man called Jerry said, "Hey, Voss. Hey, Voss old kid. You're fine now. You're fine."

The dog panted, didn't move. The man straightened up and went close to him, pulled one of the dog's ears. The dog turned

his head sideways and let his ear be pulled. The man stroked his head, unbuckled the chewed muzzle and got it off.

He stood up with the end of the broken chain and the dog came up on his feet obediently, went out through the swing door into the back part of the house, at the man's side.

I moved a little, out of line with the swing door. Jerry might have more shotguns. There was something about Jerry's face that worried me. As if I had seen him before, but not very lately, or in a newspaper.

I looked at the woman. She was a handsome brunette in her early thirties. Her print house dress didn't seem to belong with her finely arched eyebrows and her long soft hands.

"How did it happen?" I asked casually, as if it didn't matter very much.

Her voice snapped at me, as if she was aching to turn it loose. "We've been in the house about a week. Rented it furnished. I was in the kitchen, Jerry in the yard. The car stopped out front and the little guy marched in just as if he lived here. The door didn't happen to be locked, I guess. I opened the swing door a crack and saw him pushing the dog into the cupboard. Then I smelled the chloroform. Then things began to happen all at once and I went for a gun and called Jerry."

"It was all over then?" I said. "He had Sharp chewed up on the floor?"

"Yes—if Sharp is his name."

"You and Jerry didn't know him?"

"Never saw him before. Or the dog. But Jerry loves dogs."

"Better change a little of that," I said. "Jerry knew the dog's name. Voss."

Her eyes got tight and her mouth got stubborn. "I think you must be mistaken," she said in a sultry voice.

"Who's Jerry?" I asked. "I've seen him somewhere. Where'd he get the sawed-off? You going to let the cops see that?"

She bit her lip, then stood up suddenly, went towards the fallen shotgun. I let her pick it up, saw she kept her hand away from the triggers. She went back to the window seat and pushed it under the pile of newspapers.

She faced me. "O.K., what's the pay-off?" she asked grimly.

I said slowly, "The dog is stolen. His owner, a girl, happens to be missing. I'm hired to find her. The people Sharp said he got the dog from sounded like you and Jerry. Their name was Voss. They moved east. Ever hear of a lady called Isobel Snare?"

The woman said, "No," tonelessly, and stared at the end of my chin.

The man in overalls came back through the swing door wiping his face on the sleeve of his blue work-shirt. He didn't have any fresh guns with him. He looked me over without much concern.

Tyres squealed, taking a distant corner.

"Aw, loosen up," I said quickly. "Sharp was scared. He brought the dog back to where he got him. He must have thought

the house was empty. The chloroform idea wasn't so good, but the little guy was all rattled."

They didn't make a sound, either of them. They just stared at me.

"O.K.," I said, and stepped over to the corner of the room. "I think you're on the lam. If whoever's coming isn't law, I'll start shooting. Don't ever think I won't."

The woman said very calmly, "Suit yourself."

Then a car rushed along the block and ground to a harsh stop before the house. Two big bruisers in plain-clothes tumbled out and slammed through the gate, up the steps.

The door swung wide and the two dicks charged in with drawn guns.

They stopped dead, stared at what lay on the floor. Their guns jerked at Jerry and me. The one who covered me was a big red-faced man in a baggy grey suit.

"Reach—and reach empty!" he yelled in a large tough voice.

I reached, but held on to my Luger. "Easy," I said. "A dog killed him, not a gun. I'm a private dick. I'm on a case here."

"Yeah?" He closed in on me heavily, bored his gun into my stomach. "Maybe so, bud. We'll know all that later on."

He reached up and jerked my gun loose from my hand, sniffed at it, leaning his gun into me.

"Fired, huh? Sweet! Turn around."

"Listen—"

"Turn around, bud."

I turned slowly. Even as I turned he was dropping his gun into a side-pocket and reaching for his hip.

That should have warned me, but it didn't. I may have heard the swish of the blackjack. Certainly I must have felt it. There was a sudden pool of darkness at my feet. I dived into it.

★

WHEN I came to the room was full of smoke. The smoke hung in the air, in thin lines straight up and down, like a bead curtain. I had never seen the room before.

I lay a little while thinking, then I opened my mouth and yelled, "Fire!" at the top of my lungs.

Then I fell back on the bed and started laughing. I didn't like the sound I made laughing. It had a goofy ring, even to me.

Steps ran along somewhere and a key turned in the door and the door opened. A man in a short white coat looked in at me, hard-eyed. I turned my head a little and said, "Don't count that one, Jack. It slipped out."

He scowled sharply. He had a hard small face, beady eyes. I didn't know him.

"Maybe you want some more strait-jacket," he sneered.

"I'm fine, Jack," I said. "Just fine. I'm going to have me a short nap now."

"Better be just that," he snarled.

The door shut, the key turned, the steps went away.

I lay still and looked at the smoke. I knew now that there wasn't any smoke there really. It must have been night because a porcelain bowl hanging from the ceiling on three chains had light behind it.

I took hold of the corner of the rough sheet and wiped the sweat off my face. I sat up, put my feet down on the floor. They were bare. I was wearing canton flannel pyjamas. There was no feeling in my feet when I put them down. After a while they began to tingle and then got full of pins and needles.

Then I could feel the floor. I took hold of the side of the bed and stood up and walked.

A voice that was probably my own was saying to me, " You have the D.T.s . . . you have the D.T.s . . . you have the D.T.s. . . ."

I saw a bottle of whisky on a small white table between the two windows. I started toward it. It was a Johnny Walker bottle, half full. I got it up, took a long drink from the neck. I put the bottle down again.

The whisky had a funny taste. While I was realising that it had a funny taste I saw a washbowl in the corner I just made it to the washbowl before I vomited.

I got back to the bed and lay there. The vomiting had made me very weak, but the room seemed a little more real, a little less fantastic. I could see bars on the two windows, a heavy wooden chair, no other furniture but the white table with the doped whisky on it. There was a cupboard door, shut, probably locked

The bed was a hospital bed and there were two leather straps attached to the sides, about where a man's wrists would be. I knew I was in some kind of a prison ward.

My left arm suddenly began to feel sore. I rolled up the loose sleeve, looked at half a dozen pin-pricks on the upper arm, and a black and blue circle around each one.

I had been shot so full of dope to keep me quiet that I was having the French fits coming out of it. That accounted for the smoke. The doped whisky was probably part of somebody else's cure.

I got up again and walked, kept on walking. After a while I drank a little water from the tap, kept it down, drank more. Half an hour or more of that and I was ready to talk to somebody.

The closet door was locked and the chair was too heavy for me. I stripped the bed, slid the mattress to one side There was a mesh spring underneath, fastened at the top and bottom by heavy coil springs about nine inches long. It took me half an hour and much misery to work one of these loose.

I rested a little and drank a little more cold water and went over to the hinge side of the door.

I yelled " Fire! " at the top of my voice, several times.

I waited, but not long. Steps ran along the hallway outside. The key jabbed into the door, the lock clicked. The hard-eyed little man in the short white coat dodged in furiously, his eyes on the bed.

I laid the coil spring on the angle of his jaw, then on the back of his head as he went down. I got him by the throat. He struggled a good deal. I used a knee on his face. It hurt my knee.

He didn't say how his face felt. I got a blackjack out of his right hip pocket and reversed the key in the door and locked it from the inside. There were other keys on the ring. One of them unlocked my closet. I looked in at my clothes.

I put them on slowly, with fumbling fingers. I yawned a great deal. The man on the floor didn't move.

I locked him in and left him.

From a wide silent hallway, with a parquetry floor and a narrow carpet down its middle, flat white oak banisters swept down in long curves to the entrance hall. There were closed doors, big, heavy, old-fashioned. No sound behind them. I went down the carpet runner, walking on the balls of my feet.

There were stained glass inner doors to a vestibule from which the front door opened. A telephone rang as I got that far. A man's voice answered it, from behind a half-open door through which light came out into the dim hall.

I went back, sneaked a glance, saw a man at a desk, talking into the phone. I waited until he hung up. Then I went in.

He had a pale, bony, high-crowned head, across which a thin wave of brown hair curled and was plastered to his skull. He had a long, pale, joyless face. His eyes jumped at me. His hand jumped towards a button on his desk.

I grinned, growled at him, "Don't. I'm a desperate man, warden." I showed him the blackjack.

His smile was as stiff as a frozen fish. His long pale hands made gestures like sick butterflies over the top of his desk. One of them began to drift towards a side drawer of the desk.

He worked his tongue loose. "You've been a very sick man, sir. A very sick man. I wouldn't advise—"

I flicked the blackjack at his wandering hand. It drew into itself like a slug on a hot stone. I said, "Not sick, warden, just doped within an inch of my reason. Out is what I want, and some clean whisky. Give."

He made vague motions with his fingers. "I'm Doctor Sundstrand," he said. "This is a private hospital—not a gaol."

"Whisky," I croaked. "I get all the rest. Private funny house. A lovely racket. Whisky."

"In the medicine cabinet," he said with a drifting, spent breath

"Put your hands behind your head."

"I'm afraid you'll regret this." He put his hands behind his head.

I got to the far side of the desk, opened the drawer his hand had wanted to reach, took an automatic out of it. I put the blackjack away, went back round the desk to the medicine cabinet on the wall. There was a pint bottle of bond bourbon in it, three glasses. I took two of them.

I poured two drinks. "You first, warden."

"I—I don't drink. I'm a total abstainer," he muttered, his hands still behind his head.

I took the blackjack out again. He put a hand down quickly, gulped from one of the glasses. I watched him. It didn't seem to hurt him. I smelled my dose, then put it down my throat. It worked, and I had another, then slipped the bottle into my coat pocket.

"O.K.," I said. "Who put me in here? Shake it up. I'm in a hurry."

He hunched his shoulders down in the chair. He looked sick. "A man named Galbraith signed as complaining witness. Strictly legal, I assure you. He is a police officer."

I said, "Since when can a cop sign as complaining witness on a psycho case?"

He didn't say anything.

"Who gave me the dope in the first place?"

"I wouldn't know that. I presume it has been going on a long time."

I felt my chin. "All of two days," I said. "They ought to have shot me. Less kick-back in the long run. So long, warden."

As I went out he still had his hands behind his head.

★

CHIEF OF POLICE FULWIDER was a hammered-down, fattish heavyweight, with restless eyes and that shade of red hair that is almost pink. It was cut very short and his pink scalp glistened among the pink hairs. He wore a fawn-coloured flannel suit with patch pockets and lapped seams, cut as every tailor can't cut flannel.

He shook hands with me and turned his chair sideways and crossed his legs. That showed me French lisle socks at three or four dollars a pair, and hand-made English walnut brogues at fifteen to eighteen, depression prices.

I figured that probably his wife had money.

"Ah," he said, chasing my card over the glass top of his desk, "down here on a job?"

"A little trouble," I said. "You can straighten it out, if you will."

He stuck his chest out, waved a pink hand and lowered his voice a couple of notches.

"Trouble," he said, "is something our little town don't have a lot of. Our little city is small, but very, very clean. I look out of my west window and I see the Pacific Ocean. Nothing cleaner than that. On the north Arguello Boulevard and the foothills. On the east the finest little business section you would want to see and beyond it a paradise of well-kept homes and gardens. On the south—if I had a south window, which I don't have—I would see the finest little yacht harbour in the world, for a small yacht harbour."

"I brought my trouble with me," I said. "That is, some of it.

The rest went on ahead. A girl named Isobel Snare ran off from home in the big city and her dog was seen here. I found the dog, but the people who had the dog went to a lot of trouble to sew me up."

"Is that so?" the Chief asked absently. His eyebrows crawled around on his forehead. I wasn't sure whether I was kidding him or he was kidding me. He had a right-looking bottle and two pony glasses on the desk, and a handful of cardamom seeds.

We had a drink and he cracked three or four of the cardamom seeds and we chewed them and looked at one another.

"Just tell me about it," he said then. "I can take it now."

"Did you ever hear of a guy called Farmer Saint?"

"*Did* I?" He banged his desk and the cardamom seeds jumped. "Why, there's a thousand reward on that bimbo. A bank stick-up, ain't he?"

I nodded, trying to look behind his eyes without seeming to. "He and his sister work together. Diana is her name. They dress up like country folks and smack down small town banks, state banks. That's why he's called Farmer Saint. There's a grand on the sister too."

"I would certainly like to put the sleeves on that pair," the Chief said firmly.

"Then why the hell didn't you?" I asked him.

He didn't quite hit the ceiling, but he opened his mouth so wide I was afraid his lower jaw was going to fall in his lap. His eyes stuck out like peeled eggs. He shut his mouth with all the deliberation of a steam-shovel. It was a great act, if it was an act.

"Say that again," he whispered.

I opened a folded newspaper I had with me and pointed to a column.

"Look at this Sharp killing. Your local paper didn't do so good on it. It says some unknown rang the department and the boys ran out and found a dead man in an empty house. That's a lot of noodles. I was there. Farmer Saint and his sister were there. Your cops were there when we were there."

"Treachery!" he shouted suddenly. "Traitors in the department." His face was now as grey as arsenic flypaper. He poured two more drinks, with a shaking hand. It was my turn to crack the cardamom seeds.

He put his drink down in one piece and lunged for a mahogany call box on his desk. I caught the name Galbraith.

We didn't wait very long, but long enough for the Chief to have two more drinks. His face got a better colour.

Then the door opened and the big red-faced dick who had sapped me loafed through it, with a bulldog pipe clamped in his teeth and his hands in his pockets. He shouldered the door shut, leaned against it casually.

I said, "Hullo, Sarge."

He looked at me as if he would like to kick me in the face and not have to hurry about it.

"Badge!" the fat Chief yelled. "Badge! Put it on the desk. You're fired!"

Galbraith went over to the desk slowly and put an elbow down on it, put his face about a foot from the Chief's nose.

"What was that crack?" he asked thickly.

"You had Farmer Saint under your hand and let him go," the Chief yelled. "You and that saphead Duncan. You let him stick a shotgun in your belly and get away. You're through. Fired. You ain't got no more job than a canned oyster. Gimme your badge!"

"Who the hell is Farmer Saint?" Galbraith asked, unimpressed, and blew pipe smoke in the Chief's face.

"He don't know," the Chief whined at me. "He don't know. That's the kind of material I got to work with."

"What do you mean, work?" Galbraith inquired loosely.

The fat Chief jumped as though a bee had stung the end of his nose. Then he doubled a meaty fist and hit Galbraith's jaw with what looked like a lot of power. Galbraith's head moved about half an inch.

"Don't do that," he said. "You'll bust a gut and then where would the department be?"

Fulwider looked at me, to see how the show was going over. I had my mouth open and a blank expression on my face, like a farm boy at a Latin lesson.

Galbraith stuck a thick leg over a corner of the desk and knocked his pipe out, reached for the whisky and poured himself a drink in the Chief's glass. He wiped his lips, grinned. When he grinned he opened his mouth wide, and he had a mouth a dentist could have got both hands in, up to the elbows.

He said calmly to me, "When me and Dunc crash the joint you was cold on the floor and the lanky guy was over you with a sap. The broad was on a window seat, with a lot of newspapers around her. O.K. The lanky guy starts to tell us some yarn when a dog begins to howl out back and we look that way and the broad slips a sawed-off 12-gauge out of the newspapers and shows it to us. Well, what could we do except be nice? She couldn't have missed and we could. So the guy gets more guns out of his pants and they tie knots around us and stick us in a cupboard that has enough chloroform in it to make us quiet, without the ropes. After a while we hear 'em leave, in two cars. When we get loose the stiff has the place to hisself. So we fudge it a bit for the papers. We don't get no new line yet. How's it tie to yours?"

"Not bad," I told him. "As I remember the woman phoned for some law herself. But I could be mistaken. The rest of it ties in with me being sapped on the floor and not knowing anything about it."

Galbraith gave me a nasty look. The Chief looked at his thumb.

"When I came to," I said, "I was in a private dope cure. Run by a man named Sundstrand. I was shot so full of dope myself I could have been Rockefeller's pet dime trying to spin myself."

"That Sundstrand," Galbraith said heavily. "That guy's been a flea in our pants for a long time. Should we go out and push him in the face, Chief?"

The Chief looked at the whisky bottle. He said carefully, "There's a grand each on this Saint and his sister. If we gather them in, how do we cut it?"

"You cut me out," I said. "I'm on a straight salary and expenses."

Galbraith grinned. He teetered on his heels, grinning with thick amiability.

"Okydoke. We picked up your car. We'll use that to go in—just you and me."

"Maybe you ought to have more help, Gal," the Chief said doubtfully.

"Uh-uh. Just me and him's plenty. He's a tough baby, or he wouldn't be walkin' around."

"Well, all right," the Chief said brightly. "And we'll just have a little drink on it."

But he was still rattled. He forgot the cardamom seeds.

★

IT was a cheerful spot by daylight. Tea-rose begonias made a solid mass under the front windows and pansies were a round carpet about the base of an acacia. A scarlet climbing rose covered a trellis to one side of the house, and a bronze-green humming-bird was prodding delicately in a mass of sweet peas that grew up the garage wall.

It looked like the home of a well-fixed elderly couple who had come to the ocean to get as much sun as possible in their old age.

Galbraith spat on my running-board and shook his pipe out and tickled the gate open, stamped up the path and flattened his thumb against a neat copper bell.

We waited. A grille opened in the door and a long sallow face looked out at us under a starched nurse's cap.

"Open up. It's the law," the big cop growled.

A chain rattled and a bolt slid back. The door opened. The nurse was a six-footer with long arms and big hands, an ideal torturer's assistant. Something happened to her face and I saw she was smiling.

"Why, it's Mister Galbraith," she chirped, in a voice that was high-pitched and throaty at the same time. "Did you want to see Doctor?"

"Yeah, and sudden," Galbraith growled, pushing past her.

The door of the office was shut. Galbraith kicked it open, with me at his heels and the big nurse chirping at mine.

Doctor Sundstrand, the total abstainer, was having a morning bracer out of a fresh whisky bottle. His bony mask of a face seemed to have a lot of lines in it that hadn't been there the night before.

He took his hand off the bottle hurriedly and gave us his frozen

fish smile. He said fussily, "What's this? What's this? I thought I gave orders—"

"Aw, pull your belly in," Galbraith said, and yanked a chair near the desk. "Dangle, sister."

The nurse chirped something more and went back through the door. The door was shut. Doctor Sundstrand worked his eyes up and down my face and looked unhappy.

Galbraith put both his elbows on the desk and took hold of his bulging jowls with his fists. He stared fixedly, venomously, at the squirming doctor. After what seemed a very long time he said, almost softly, "Where's Farmer Saint?"

The doctor's eyes popped wide. His greenish eyes began to look bilious.

"Don't stall!" Galbraith roared. "We know all about your private hospital racket, the crook hideout you're runnin', the dope and women on the side. You made one slip too many when you hung a snatch on this shamus from the big town. Come on, where is Saint? And where's that girl?"

I remembered, quite casually, that I had not said anything about Isobel Snare in front of Galbraith—if that was the girl he meant.

Doctor Sundstrand's hand flopped about on his desk. Sheer astonishment seemed to be adding a final touch of paralysis to his uneasiness.

"Where are they?" Galbraith yelled again.

The door opened and the big nurse fussed in again. "Now, Mister Galbraith, the patients. Please remember the patients, Mister Galbraith."

"Go climb up your thumb," Galbraith told her, over his shoulder.

She hovered by the door. Sundstrand found his voice at last. It was a mere wisp of a voice. It said wearily, "As if you didn't know."

Then his darting hand swept into his smock, and out again, with a gun glistening in it. Galbraith threw himself sideways, clean out of the chair. The doctor shot at him twice, missed twice. My hand touched a gun, but didn't draw it. Galbraith laughed on the floor and his big right hand snatched at his armpit, came up with a Luger. It looked like my Luger. It went off, just once.

Nothing changed in the doctor's long face. I didn't see where the bullet hit him. His head came down and hit the desk and his gun made a thud on the floor. He lay with his face on the desk, motionless.

Galbraith pointed his gun at me, and got up off the floor. I looked at the gun again. I was sure it was my gun.

"That's a swell way to get information," I said aimlessly. "I suppose this whole scene was framed just to put the chill on Doc."

"He shot first, didn't he?"

"Yeah," I said thinly. "He shot first."

The nurse was sidling along the wall towards me. No sound had come from her since Sundstrand pulled his act. She was almost

at my side. Suddenly, much too late, I saw the flash of knuckles on her good right hand, and hair on the back of the hand.

I dodged, but not enough. A crunching blow seemed to split my head wide open. I brought up against the wall, my knees full of water. Galbraith leered at me.

"Not so very smart," I said. "You're still holding my Luger. That sort of spoils the plant, doesn't it?"

"I see you get the idea, shamus."

The chirpy-voiced nurse said, in a blank pause, "Jeeze, the guy's got a jaw like an elephant's foot. Damn' if I didn't split a knuck on him. Should I try one more swing?"

"What for? He didn't go for his gat, and he's too tough for you, baby. Lead is his meat."

I said, "You ought to shave baby twice a day on this job."

The nurse grinned, pushed the starched cap and the stringy blonde wig askew on a bullet head. She—or more properly he—reached a gun from under the nurse's white uniform.

Galbraith said, "It was self-defence, see? You tangled with the doctor, but he shot first. Be nice and me and Dunc will try to remember it that way."

I rubbed my jaw with my left hand. "Listen, Sarge. I can take a joke as well as the next fellow. You sapped me in that house on Carolina Street and didn't tell about it. Neither did I. I figured you had reasons and you'd let me in on them at the right time. Maybe I can guess what the reasons are. I think you know where Saint is, or can find out. Saint knows where the Snare girl is because he had her dog. Let's put a little more into this deal, something for both of us."

"We've got ours, sap. I promised the doctor I'd bring you back and let him play with you. I put Dunc in here in the nurse's rig to handle you for him. But *he* was the one we really wanted to handle."

"All right," I said. "What do I get out of it?"

"Maybe a little more living."

I said, "Yeah. Don't think I'm kidding you—but look at that little window in the wall behind you."

Galbraith didn't move, didn't take his eyes off me. A thick sneer curved his lips.

Duncan, the female impersonator, looked—and yelled.

A small, square, tinted glass window high up in the corner of the back wall had swung open quite silently. I was looking at it, past Galbraith's ear, straight at the black snout of a tommy-gun, on the sill, at the two hard black eyes behind the gun.

A voice I had last heard soothing a dog said, "How's to drop the rod, sister? And you at the desk—grab a cloud."

★

THE big cop's mouth sucked for air. Then his whole face tightened and he jerked around and the Luger gave one hard, sharp cough.

I dropped to the floor as the tommy-gun cut loose in a short burst. Galbraith crumpled beside the desk, fell on his back with his legs twisted. Blood came out of his nose and mouth.

The cop in nurse's uniform turned as white as the starched cap. His gun bounced. His hands tried to claw at the ceiling.

There was a queer, stunned silence.

A door opened and shut distinctly and running steps came along the hall. The door of our room was pushed wide. Diana Saint came in with a brace of automatics in her hands.

I got up off the floor, keeping my hands in sight. She tossed her voice calmly at the window, without looking towards it.

"O.K., Jerry. I can hold them."

Saint's head and shoulders and his submachine-gun went away from the frame of the window, leaving blue sky and the thin, distant branches of a tall tree.

In the room we were five statues, two fallen.

Somebody had to move. The situation called for two more killings. From Saint's angle I couldn't see it any other way. There had to be a clean-up.

The gag hadn't worked when it wasn't a gag. I tried it again when it was. I looked past the woman's shoulder, kicked a hard grin on to my face, said hoarsely, "Hullo, Mike. Just in time."

It didn't fool her, of course, but it made her mad. She stiffened her body and snapped a shot at me from the right-hand gun. It was a big gun for a woman and it jumped. The other gun jumped with it. I didn't see where the shot went.

I wasn't too nice about knocking the guns out of her hands. I kicked the door shut, reached up and yanked the key around, then scrambled back from a high-heeled shoe that was doing its best to smash my nose for me.

Duncan dived for his gun on the floor.

"Watch that little window, if you want to live," I snarled at him.

Then I was behind the desk, dragging the phone away from Doctor Sundstrand's dead body, dragging it as far from the line of the door as the cord would let me. I lay down on the floor with it and started to dial, on my stomach.

Diana's eyes came alive on the phone. She screeched: "They've got me, Jerry! They've got me!"

The machine-gun began to tear the door apart as I bawled into the ear of a bored desk sergeant.

Pieces of plaster and wood flew like fists at an Irish wedding. Slugs jerked the body of Doctor Sundstrand as though a chill was shaking him back to life. I grabbed Diana's guns and started in on the door for our side. Through a wide crack I could see cloth. I shot at that.

I couldn't see what Duncan was doing. Then I knew. A shot that couldn't have come through the door smacked Diana Saint square on the end of her chin.

She went down again, stayed down.

Another shot that didn't come through the door lifted my hat.

I rolled and yelled at Duncan. His gun moved in a stiff arc, following me. His mouth was an animal snarl.

I yelled again.

Four round patches of red appeared in a diagonal line across the nurse's uniform, chest high. They spread even in the short time it took Duncan to fall.

There was a siren somewhere. It was my siren, coming my way, getting louder. Saint had to go. I heard his step running away down the hall. A door slammed. A car started out back in an alley.

I crawled over to the woman and looked at blood on her face and hair and soft soggy places on the front of her coat. I touched her face. She opened her eyes slowly, as if the lids were very heavy.

"Jerry—" she whispered.

"Dead," I lied grimly. "Where's Isobel Snare, Diana?"

The eyes closed. Tears glistened, the tears of the dying.

"Where's Isobel, Diana?" I pleaded. "Be regular and tell me. I'm no cop. I'm her friend. Tell me, Diana."

I put tenderness and wistfulness into it, everything I had.

The eyes half opened. The whisper came again: "Jerry—" The lips moved once more, breathed a word that sounded like "Monty."

That was all. She died.

I stood up slowly and listened to the sirens.

★

IT was getting late and lights were going on here and there in a tall office building across the street. I had been in Fulwider's office all the afternoon. I had told my story twenty times. It was all true—what I told.

The fat Chief was sweaty and suspicious. His coat was off and his armpits were black and his short red hair curled as if it had been singed. Not knowing how much or little I knew he didn't dare lead me. All he could do was yell at me and whine at me by turns, and try to get me drunk in between.

I was getting drunk and liking it.

He took hold of his jaw and cranked it. "Damn funny," he sneered. "Four dead ones on the floor and you not even nicked."

"I was the only one," I said, "that lay down on the floor while still healthy."

He took hold of his right ear and worried that. "You been here three days," he howled. "In them three days we got more crime than in three years before you come. It ain't human."

"You can't blame me, Chief," I grumbled. "I came down here to look for a girl. I'm still looking for her. I didn't tell Saint and his sister to hide out in your town. I didn't shoot Doc Sundstrand before anything could be got out of him. I still haven't any idea why the phony nurse was planted there."

"Nor me," Fulwider yelled. "But it's my job that's shot full

of holes. For all the chance I got to get out of this I might as well go fishin' right now."

I took another drink, hiccupped cheerfully. "Don't say that, Chief," I pleaded. "You cleaned the town up once and you can do it again."

He took a turn around the office and tried to punch a hole in the end wall, then slammed himself back in his chair.

"I'll make a deal with you," he growled. "You run on back to San Angelo and I'll forget it was your gun croaked Sundstrand."

"That's not a nice thing to say to a man that's trying to earn his living, Chief. You know how it happened to be my gun."

His face looked grey again, for a moment. He measured me for a coffin. Then the mood passed and he smacked his desk, said heartily, "You're right. I couldn't do that, could I? You still got to find that girl, ain't you? O.K., you run on back to the hotel and get some rest. I'll work on it tonight and see you in the a.m."

I took another short drink, which was all there was left in the bottle. I felt fine. I shook hands with him twice and staggered out of his office

I went on down the sidestreets to the ocean front, walked along the wide cement walk towards the two amusement piers.

It was getting dusk now. Lights on the piers came out. Masthead lights were lit on the small yachts riding at anchor behind the yacht harbour breakwater. In a white barbecue stand a man tickled wienies with a long fork and droned, "Get hungry, folks. Nice hot doggies here. Get hungry, folks."

I lit a cigarette and stood there looking out to sea. Very suddenly, far out, lights shone from a big ship. I watched them, but they didn't move.

I went over to the hot dog man.

"Anchored?" I asked him, pointing.

He looked around the end of his booth, wrinkled his nose with contempt.

"Hell, that's the gambling boat. The Cruise to Nowhere, they call the act, because it don't go no place. Yes, sir, that's the good ship *Montecito*. How about a nice warm doggie?"

I put a quarter on his counter. "Have one yourself," I said softly.

I had no gun. I went on back to the hotel to get my spare.

The dying Diana Saint had said "Monty."

Perhaps she just hadn't lived long enough to say "Montecito."

I was tailed from the hotel, but not very far. Of course the clean little city didn't have enough crime for the dicks to be very good shadows . . .

It was a long ride for forty cents. The water taxi, an old speedboat without trimmings, slid through the anchored yachts and rounded the breakwater. The swell hit us. All the company I had besides the tough-looking citizen at the wheel was two spooning couples who began to peck at each other's faces as soon as the darkness folded down.

The portholes of the *Montecito* got large and the taxi swept out in a wide turn, tipped to an angle of forty-five degrees, and careened neatly to the side of a brightly-lit stage.

A sloe-eyed boy in a tight blue mess jacket and a gangster mouth handed the girls out, swept their escorts with a keen glance, sent them on up. The look he gave me told me something about him. The way he bumped into my gun holster told me more.

"Nix," he said softly. "Nix."

He jerked his chin at the taxi man. The taxi man dropped a short noose over a bitt, turned his wheel a little and climbed on the stage. He got behind me.

"Nix," the one in the mess jacket purred. "No gats on this boat, mister. Sorry."

"Part of my clothes," I told him. "I'm a private dick. I'll check it."

The taxi man hooked a wrist through my right arm. I shrugged.

"Back in the boat," the taxi man growled behind me. "I owe you forty cents, mister. Come on."

I got back into the boat.

Mess jacket's sleek, silent smile was the last thing I saw as the taxi cast off and hit the swell on the way back. I hated to leave that smile.

The way back seemed longer. I didn't speak to the taxi man and he didn't speak to me. As I got out on to the float at the pier he sneered at my back, "Some other night when we ain't so busy, shamus."

Half a dozen customers waiting to go out stared at me. I went past them, past the door of the waiting-room on the float, towards the steps at the landward end.

A big red-headed roughneck in dirty sneakers and tarry pants and a torn blue jersey straightened from the railing and bumped into me casually. I stopped, got set. He said softly, "'Smatter, dick? No soap on the hell ship?"

"Do I have to tell you?"

"I'm a guy that can listen."

"Who are you?"

"Just call me Red."

"Out of the way, Red. I'm busy."

He smiled sadly, touched my left side. "The gat's kind of bulgy under the light suit," he said. "Want to get on board? It can be done, if you got a reason."

"How much is the reason?" I asked him.

"Fifty bucks. Ten more if you bleed in my boat."

I started away. "Twenty-five," he said quickly. "Maybe you come back with friends, huh?"

I went four steps away from him before I half turned, said, "Sold," and went on.

At the foot of the bright amusement pier there was a flaring Tango Parlour, jammed full even at that still early hour. I went into it, leaned against a wall.

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A large blueness took form beside me and I smelled tar. A soft, deep, sad voice said, " Need help out there? "

" I'm looking for a girl, but I'll look alone. What's your racket? " I didn't look at him.

" A dollar here, a dollar there. I like to eat. I was on the cops but they bounced me."

I liked his telling me that. " You must have been levelling," I said, and watched the house player slip his card across with his thumb over the wrong number, watched the counter man get his own thumb in the same spot and hold the card up..

I could feel Red's grin. " I see you been around our little city."

I got my wallet out and slipped a twenty and a five from it, passed them over in a wad. They went into a tarry pocket.

Red said, " Thanks," softly and walked away. I gave him a small start and went after him. He was easy to follow by his size, even in a crowd.

We went past the yacht harbour and the second amusement pier and beyond that the lights got fewer and the crowd thinned to nothing. A short black pier stuck out into the water with boats moored all along it.

He stopped almost at the end of it, at the head of a wooden ladder.

" I'll bring her down to here," he said.

" Listen," I said urgently. " I have to phone a man. I forgot."

" Can do. Come on."

He led to the way farther along the pier, knelt, rattled keys on a chain, and opened a padlock. He lifted a small trap and took a phone out, listened to it.

" Still working," he said with a grin in his voice. " Must belong to some crooks. Don't forget to snap the lock back on."

He slipped away silently into the darkness. I listened to water slapping the piles of the pier, the occasional whir of a seagull in the gloom. Then far off a motor roared and kept on roaring.

I dialled a number, asked for Chief Fulwider. He had gone home. I dialled another number, got a woman, asked her for the Chief, said I was headquarters.

I waited again. Then I heard the fat Chief's voice. It sounded full of baked potato.

" Yeah? Can't a guy even eat? Who is it? "

" Me, Chief. Saint is on the *Montecito*. Too bad that's over your line."

He began to yell like a wild man. I hung up in his face, put the phone back in its zinc-lined cubbyhole and snapped the padlock. I went down the ladder to Red.

★

THERE were no floodlights on the seaward side of the ship. Red cut his motor to half of nothing and curved in under the overhang of the stern, sidled up to the greasy plates as coyly as a clubman in a hotel lobby.

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Double iron doors loomed high over us, forward a little from the slimy links of a chain cable. The speedboat scuffed the *Montecito*'s ancient plates and the sea-water slapped loosely at the bottom of the speedboat under our feet. The shadow of the big ex-cop rose over me. A coiled rope flicked against the dark, caught on something, and fell back into the boat. Red pulled it tight, made a turn around something on the engine cowling.

I took the wheel and held the nose of the speedboat against the slippery hull, and Red reached for an iron ladder flat to the side of the ship, hauled himself up into the darkness.

After a while something creaked up above and feeble yellow light trickled out into the foggy air. The outline of a heavy door showed, and Red's crouched head against the light.

I went up the ladder after him. It was hard work. It landed me panting in a sour, littered hold full of cases and barrels. Rats skittered out of sight in the dark corners. The big man put his lips to my ear: " From here we got an easy way to the boiler-room catwalk. From the boiler-room I'll show you a ventilator with no grating in it. Goes to the boat deck. Then it's all yours. Will you come back fast? "

" I ought to make a good splash from the boat deck." I fished more bills out of my wallet, pushed them at him. " Here."

He shook his red head.

" Uh-huh. That's for the trip back."

" I'm buying it now," I said. " Even if I don't use it. Take the dough before I bust out crying."

" Well—thanks, pal. You're a right guy."

We went among the cases and barrels. The yellow light came from a passage beyond, and we went along the passage to a narrow iron door. That led to the catwalk. We sneaked along it, down an oily steel ladder, heard the slow hiss of oil-burners and went among mountains of iron towards the sound.

Around a corner we looked at a short, dirty Italian in a purple silk shirt who sat in a wired-together office chair, under a naked bulb, and read the paper with the aid of steel-rimmed spectacles and a black forefinger.

Red said gently, " Hi, Shorty. How's all the little bambinos? "

The Italian opened his mouth and Red hit him. We put him down on the floor and tore his purple shirt into shreds for ties and a gag.

" You ain't supposed to hit a guy with glasses on," Red said. " But the idea is you make a hell of a racket goin' up a ventilator—to a guy down here. Upstairs they won't hear nothing."

I said that was the way I would like it, and we left the Italian bound up on the floor and found the ventilator that had no grating in it. I shook hands with Red, said I hoped to see him again, and started up the ladder inside the ventilator.

It was cold and black and the foggy air rushed down it and the way up seemed a long way. After three minutes that felt like an hour I reached the top and poked my head out cautiously.

I listened, but didn't hear any police-boat sirens. I got out of the ventilator, lowered myself to the deck.

Whispering came from a necking couple huddled under a boat. They didn't pay any attention to me. I went along the deck past the closed doors of three or four cabins. There was a little light behind the shutters of two of them. I listened, didn't hear anything but the merry-making of the customers down below on the main deck.

I dropped into a dark shadow, took a lungful of air and let it out in a howl—the snarling howl of a grey timber wolf, lonely and hungry and far from home, and mean enough for seven kinds of trouble.

The deep-toned woof-woofing of a police dog answered me.

I straightened and unshipped my gun and ran towards the barking. The noise came from a cabin on the other side of the deck.

I put an ear to the door, listened to a man's voice soothing the dog. The dog stopped barking and growled once or twice, then was silent. A key turned in the door I was touching.

I dropped away from it, down on one knee. The door opened a foot and a sleek head came forward past its edge. Light from a hooded deck lamp made a shine on the black hair.

I stood up and slammed the head with my gun barrel. The man fell softly out of the doorway into my arms. I dragged him back into the cabin, pushed him down on a made-up berth.

I shut the door again, locked it. A small, wide-eyed girl crouched on the other berth.

I said, " Hullo, Miss Snare. I've had a lot of trouble finding you. Want to go home? "

Farmer Saint rolled over and sat up, holding his head. Then he was very still, staring at me with his sharp black eyes. His mouth had a strained smile, almost good-humoured.

I ranged the cabin with a glance, didn't see where the dog was, but saw an inner door behind which he could be. I looked at the girl again.

She was not much to look at, like most of the people that make most of the trouble. She was crouched on the berth with her knees drawn up and hair falling over one eye. She wore a knitted dress and golf socks and sports shoes with wide tongues that fell down over the instep. Her knees were bare and bony under the hem of the dress. She looked like a schoolgirl.

I went over Saint for a gun, didn't find one. He grinned at me.

The girl lifted her hand and threw her hair back. She looked at me as if I was a couple of blocks away. Then her breath caught and she began to cry.

" We're married," Saint said softly. " She thinks you're set to blow holes in me. That was a smart trick with the wolf howl."

I didn't say anything. I listened. No noises outside.

" How'd you know where to come? " Saint asked.

" Diana told me—before she died," I said brutally.

His eyes looked hurt.

"I don't believe it, shamus."

"You ran out and left her in the ditch. What would you expect?"

"I figured the cops wouldn't bump a woman and I could make some kind of a deal on the outside. Who got her?"

"One of Fulwider's cops. You got him."

His head jerked back and a wild look came over his face, then went away. He smiled sideways at the weeping girl.

"Hullo, sugar. I'll get you clear." He looked back at me. "Suppose I come in without a scrap. Is there a way for her to get loose?"

"You got her into it," I said. "You can't get her out. That's part of the pay-off."

He nodded slowly, looked down at the floor between his feet. The girl stopped crying long enough to mop at her cheeks, then started in again.

"Fulwider know I'm here?" Saint asked me slowly.

"Yeah."

He shrugged. "That's O.K. from your end. Sure. Only I'll never get to talk, if Fulwider pinches me. If I could get to talk to a D.A. I could maybe convince him *she's* not hep to my stuff."

"You could have thought of that, too," I said heavily. "You didn't have to go back to Sundstrand's and cut loose with your stutter-gun."

He threw his head back and laughed. "No? Suppose you paid a guy ten grand for protection and he crossed you up by grabbing your wife and sticking her in a crooked dope hospital and telling you to run along far away and be good, or the tide would wash her up on the beach? What would you do—smile, or trot over with some heavy iron to talk to the guy?"

"She wasn't there then," I said. "You were just kill-screwy. And if you hadn't hung on to that dog until he killed a man, the protection wouldn't have been scared into selling you out."

"I like dogs," Saint said quietly. "I'm a nice guy when I'm not workin', but I can get shoved around just so much."

I listened. Still no noises on deck outside.

"Listen," I said quickly. "If you want to play ball with me, I've got a boat at the back door and I'll try to get the girl home before they want her. What happens to you is past me."

The girl said suddenly, in a shrill, little-girl voice, "I don't want to go home! I won't go home!"

"A year from now you'll thank me," I snapped at her.

"He's right, sugar," Saint said. "Better beat it with him."

"I won't," the girl shrilled angrily. "I just won't. That's all."

Out of the silence on the deck something hard slammed the outside of the door. A grim voice shouted, "Open up! It's the law!"

I backed swiftly to the door, keeping my eyes on Saint. I spoke back over my shoulder.

" Fulwider there? "

" Yeah," the Chief's fat voice growled.

" Listen, Chief. Saint's in here and he's ready to surrender. There's a girl here with him, the one I told you about. So come in easy, will you? "

" Right," the Chief said. " Open the door."

I twisted the key, jumped across the cabin and put my back against the inner partition, beside the door behind which the dog was moving around now, growling a little.

The outer door whipped open. Two men I hadn't seen before charged in with drawn guns. The fat Chief was behind them. Briefly, before he shut the door, I caught a glimpse of ship's uniforms.

The two dicks jumped on Saint, slammed him around, put cuffs on him. Then they stepped back beside the Chief. Saint grinned at them, with blood trickling down his lower lip.

Fulwider looked at me reprovingly and moved a cigar around in his mouth. Nobody seemed to take any interest in the girl.

One of the dicks said roughly, " Put the heater away, shamus."

" Try and make me," I told him.

He started forward, but the Chief waved him back. The other dick watched Saint, looked at nothing else.

" How'd you find him then? " Fulwider wanted to know.

" Not by taking his money to hide him out," I said.

Nothing changed in Fulwider's face. His voice became almost lazy.

" Oh, oh, you've been peekin'," he said very gently.

I said disgustedly, " Just what kind of a sap did you and your gang take me for? Your clean little town stinks. It's the well-known whited sepulchre. A crook sanctuary where the hot rods can lie low—if they pay off nice and don't pull any local capers—and where they can jump off for Mexico in a fast boat, if the finger waves towards them."

The Chief said very carefully, " Any more? "

" Yeah," I shouted. " I've saved it for you too damn long. *You* had me doped until I was half goofy and stuck me in a private gaol. When that didn't hold me *you* worked a plant up with Galbraith and Duncan to have my gun kill Sundstrand, your helper, and then have me killed resisting some arrest. Saint spoilt that party for you and saved my life. Not intending to, perhaps, but he did it. *You* knew all along where the little Snare girl was. She was Saint's wife and you were holding her yourself to make him stay in line. Hell, why do you suppose I tipped you he was out here? That was something you *didn't* know! "

The dick who had tried to make me put up my gun said, " Now, Chief. We better make it fast. The Feds—"

Fulwider's jaw shook. His face was grey and his ears were far back in his head. The cigar twitched in his fat mouth. " Wait a

minute," he said thickly. Then to me: "Well—why did you tip me?"

"To get you where you're no more law than Billy the Kid," I said, "and see if you have the guts to go through with murder on the high seas."

Saint laughed. He shot a low, snarling whistle between his teeth. A tearing animal growl answered him. The door beside me crashed open as though a mule had kicked it. The big police dog came through the opening in a looping spring that carried him clear across the cabin. The grey body twisted mid-air. A gun banged harmlessly.

"Eat 'em up, Voss!" Saint yelled. "Eat 'em alive, boy!"

The cabin filled with gunfire. The snarling of the dog blended with a thick, choked scream. Fulwider and one of the dicks were down on the floor and the dog was at Fulwider's throat.

The girl screamed and plunged her face into a pillow. Saint slid softly down from the bunk and lay on the floor with blood running slowly down his neck.

The dick who hadn't gone down jumped to one side, almost fell headlong on the girl's berth, then caught his balance and pumped bullets into the dog's long grey body—wildly, without pretence of aim.

The dick on the floor pushed at the dog. The dog almost bit his hand off. The man yelled. Feet pounded on the deck. Yelling outside. 'Something was running down my face that tickled. My head felt funny, but I didn't know what had hit me.

I got the dog off Fulwider and I saw where a stray bullet had drilled the Chief's forehead between the eyes, with the delicate exactness of pure chance.

The standing dick's gun hammer clicked on a discharged shell. He cursed, started to reload frantically.

I touched the blood on my face and looked at it. It seemed very black. The light in the cabin seemed to be failing.

Then all the lights went out very slowly, as in a theatre just as the curtain goes up. Just as it got quite dark my head hurt me, but I didn't know then that a bullet had creased my skull.

I woke up two days later in the hospital. I was there three weeks. Saint didn't live long enough to hang, but he lived long enough to tell his story. He must have told it well, because they let Mrs. Jerry (Farmer) Saint and her dog go home to her aunt. I never saw her again.

There were a lot of new faces around the City Hall, I heard. One of them was a big red-headed detective sergeant who said he owed me twenty-five dollars but had had to use it to buy a new suit when he got his job back. He said he would pay me out of his first cheque. I said I would try to wait.

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## ACROSS

1 Legally binding? (3, 4).

4 Syrian Venus (7).

9 Medicos swear by him (11).

11 Essential ingredient of wiener schnitzel (4).

12 What's the excitement about—porridge? (4).

13 " Hope springs ——" (Pope) (7).

15 Give the artist a hand —he's in a state! (6).

16 Slender missile with a point (6).

17 When sweet, doesn't eat! (3).

19 Dramatist writing—sounds reedy (6).

20 Look with hate (6).

22 End product from flow to floe (3).

25 Vessel turned to pink (6).

27 With an edge of colour about one millimetre (6).

28 Grain that is sown in Africa (7).

29 Not all my eye! (4).

31 Jacob's son (4).

32 Most unusual of all Jack's trades (5, 6).

33 Home of the Spanish pomegranate? (7).

34 Opening for a number of people (7).

## DOWN

1 Valiant person ? (7).

2 " Shuffled off this mortal ——" (*Hamlet*) (4).

3 Swift's flying island (6).

5 He's able to go about more than ordinary (6).

6 They often have it in committee (4).

7 He triumphs in legal engagements? (7).

8 Game point at a fencing position? (6).

9 Sign of nerves at the introduction? (11).

10 No. 1 dressing-room at Westminster ! (4, 7).

13 Mr. Butler's work's in the here and now (7).

14 Syrian tobacco port (7).

17 Greek letter with postscript (3).

18 Adam's is water (3).

21 Author has nap on the heath (7).

23 Giving lip? Probably nosy too! (6).

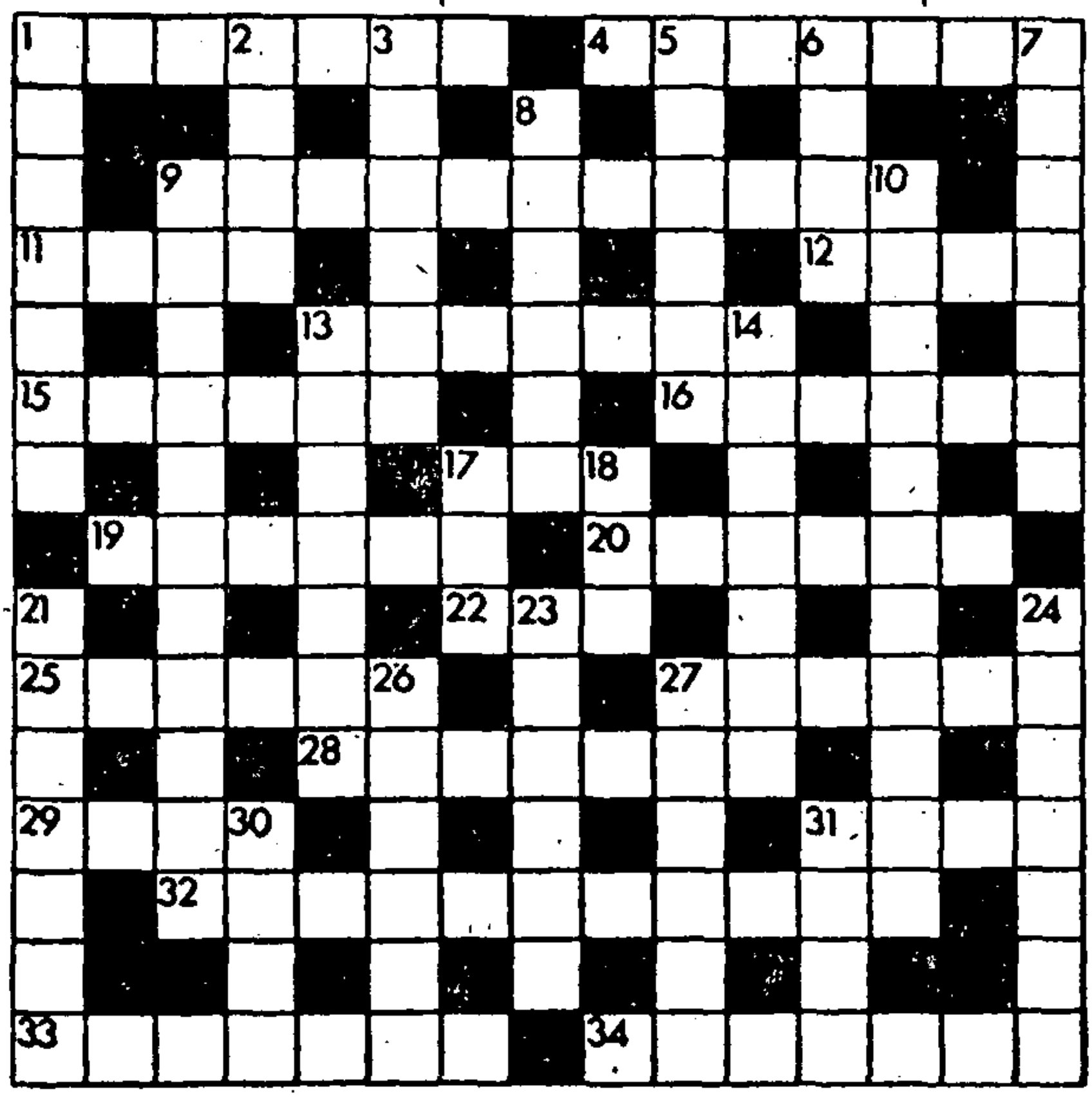
24 A divine is on the way to become essayist (7).

26 It's canned in America (6).

27 Venetian place of note in Rio (6).

30 Underwrite mixed gins (4).

31 New deal for mother of twins (4).



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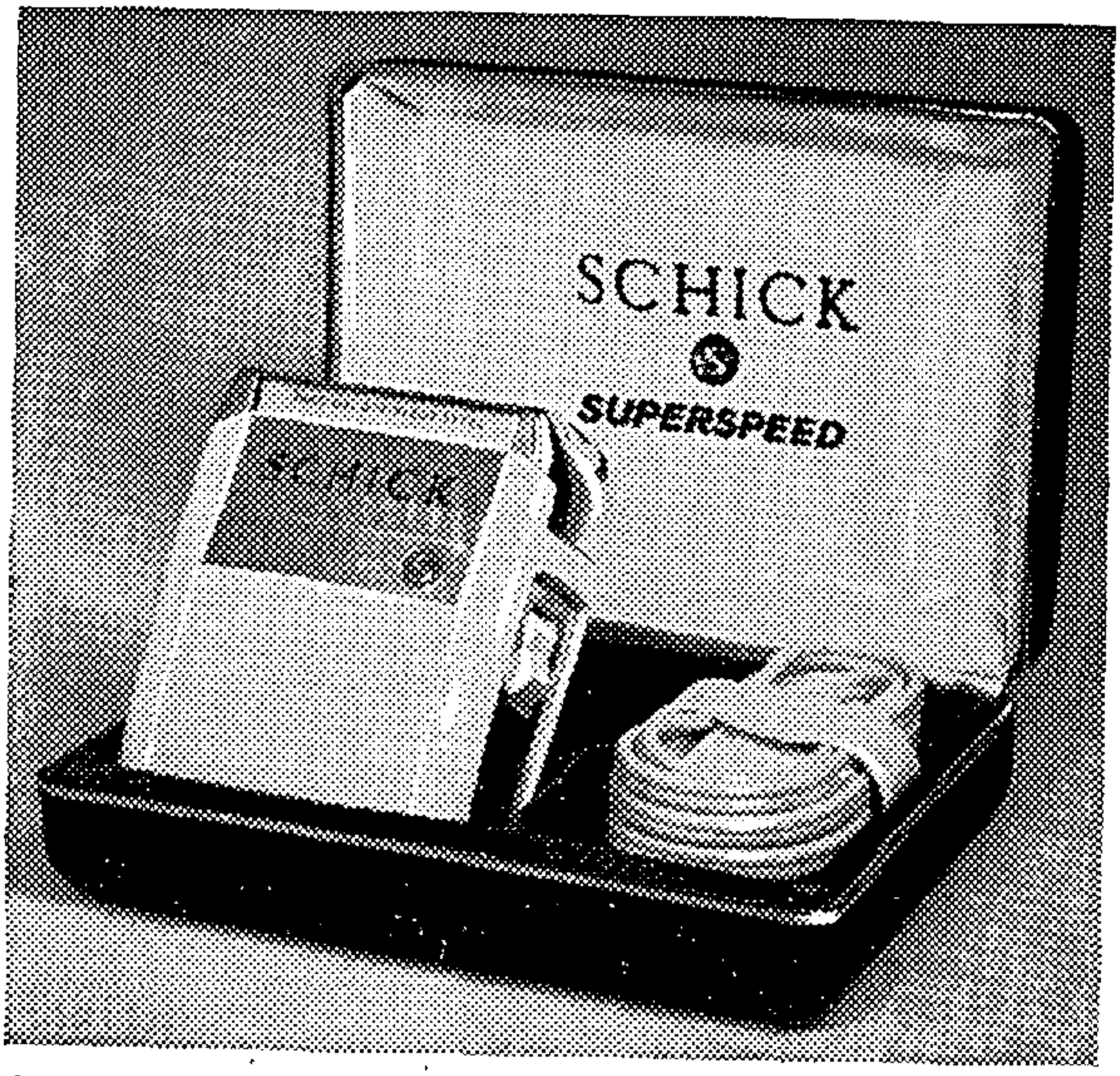


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ARGOSY'S PRIZE CROSSWORD COMPETITION

Argosy's Special Prize Crossword Competition is open to all readers whose entries reach us on or before the closing date, **Monday 13 April.** This month the prize, for the first correct solution to be checked on the closing date, is the **Schick Superspeed Shaver** shown above. Entries should be completed in ink. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper and send it to us, not forgetting to add your name and address in capital letters. Please post your entry **in a 3d. stamped envelope to :** ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 2), 1/2 Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London E.C.4. (Comp.) to arrive by **13 April, the closing date.** The name of the winner of the Schick Superspeed Shaver and the solution to the crossword will appear in July Argosy, on sale 10 June 1964.

Printed in England by PERCY BROTHERS LTD., THE HOTSPUR PRESS, MANCHESTER. 1, and published on the tenth of each month by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD., FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, £1 19s. for 12 months, 19s. 6d. for 6 months. Overseas, £1 19s. for 12 months; 19s. 6d. for 6 months. *Sole Agents*: Australasia, Messrs. GORDON & GOTCH LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. KINGSTONS LTD.. ARGOSY is sold subject to the following conditions, namely, that it shall not, without the written consent of the publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

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